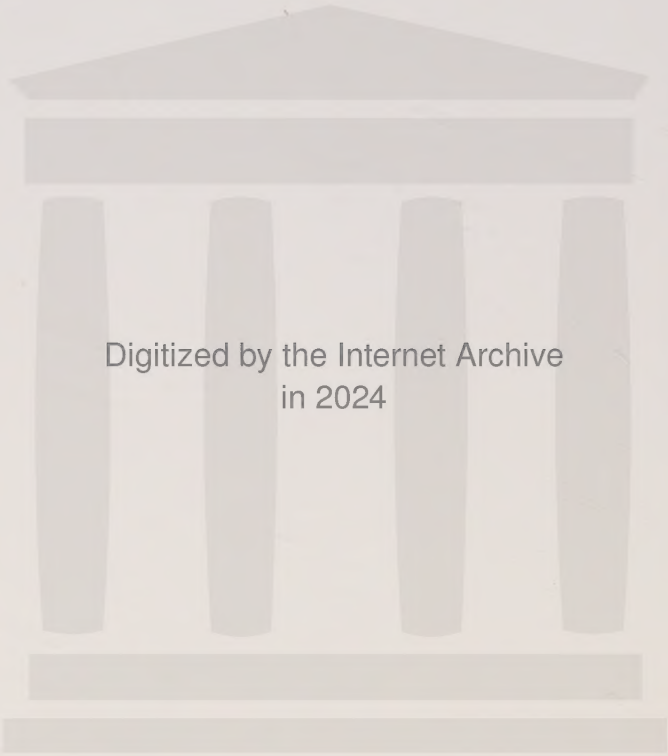
Lilith's Fire

Deborah Grenn-Scott

Reclaiming our Sacred Lifeforce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Deborah Grenn-Scott

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Lilith's Fire: Reclaiming Our Sacred Lifeforce

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For all my mothers, sisters and daughters

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They have set forth myriad new models of leadership; many have broken and continue to break unexplored, often explosive ground to create new culture, regardless of the personal cost. Their work, in all its forms, gives me inspiration and great fulfillment in the present and illuminates the possibility of a future once again based on partnership and spiritual reason.

Deborah Grenn-Scott

FOREWORD

Read this book at your own peril! So clearly and passionately does Deborah Grenn-Scott invoke Lilith that the reader cannot help but be changed – moved into a place of ancient power and new strength.

Lilith's Fire demonstrates that scholarship is prayer, the intellect an active participant, in what Carl Jung described as "the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God". But it is the voice of the female Divine – strong, erotic, autonomous – that we hear in this book. The voice of women's lost souls. A language for our questions.

Tracing the mythic figure Lilith over the last five thousand years, from Inanna to contemporary "witch" and "whore", this volume lays before us the parallel story of women in male-voiced cultures – Lilith's demonization is *our* demonization. We are shown how women's original confident, creative selves have been subsumed by the shame and guilt imposed upon us by the very religions we adhered to.

By reclaiming the Lilith in each of us, we can fly free of our imposed "sins": of being sexual, of not being silent, of being women. Lilith's divine rage is a transformative energy. She demands to be embodied, to be experienced. Deborah Grenn-Scott brings her *experience* of Lilith – ritualistic, personal, professional, and of the heart – to these pages, along with her rigorous scholarship. A voice of extraordinary integrity emerges to inspire us all.

Cosi Fabian
San Francisco

"Never, ever, for the sake of peace and quiet, deny your own experience"

- Dag Hammerskjold

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And Lilith left Adam and went to seek her own place
And the gates were closed behind her and her name
Was stricken from the Book of Life

- ***from the poem "Lilith of the Wildwood, of the Fair Places" by Susan Sherman***

II. PREFACE

This book was inspired by my MA thesis, which focused on Lilith--the First Woman created by God, according to Jewish folklore--and draws on her as both role model and symbol. Here, I examine why and how modern women are often demonized—identified as "bad" for actions perceived as reasonable for men, or simply by virtue of being female—through the same techniques used to silence our foremothers. I also investigate how contemporary women have started to reverse the effects of this demonization by redefining for themselves what is right and wrong.

In so doing, I try to counter existing myths and raise new questions about behavior usually classified by our society as sinful or shameful. I hope that you will come to see how urgent it is for us to work together to change a system that equates sex with sin, things erotic with things pornographic or violent.

As a basis for the discussion, I draw on the work of women who provide strong models for a more proud, sensual, confident way of being than that espoused by Western social and religious structures.

'Sacred' texts, art, mythological tales and writings, oral traditions, and ritual objects such as amulets have been

among the primary vehicles used to demonize Lilith from ancient times through the Middle Ages and even today.

Demonization, an insidious technique at best, is an effective literary, religious and social weapon, a subtle tool of social control and psychological manipulation often wielded with such dexterity as to be invisible to the very people bound by it. I think it is important to also look at current uses of this weapon in the modern workplace, in religious structures, within families and in our own neighborhoods.

I refer, for instance, to those things which are *deeply disturbing* but are still embedded in this society and therefore taken as 'normal', such as ads and movies which characterize sexually healthy women as sluts, and oral or written texts which accuse independent women of a variety of mental health problems from nymphomania to paranoia.

Even worse is the telling of rape 'jokes'. One may feel vaguely uncomfortable at the telling, but rarely do people speak out against such so-called humor. Women themselves pass along such degrading 'jokes' in e-mail; women themselves laugh daily at a plethora of other misogynist and homophobic psychological put-downs in bars and offices without realizing that they are perpetuating their own negative self-image and widening the schisms between women.

Unless we are vigilant, using critical listening skills and speaking out against this use of language, we will not see our "civilization" evolve. Instead, we will pass on to our children a culture still rooted in violence and inequality.

Calling attention to the effects of tasteless, hurtful 'jokes', of a society in which 'might makes right' is a necessary if unpopular step toward changing these behaviors. While some may think they are immune to their effects, no one is exempt.

Demonization, both a cause and a by-product of these actions, is perpetrated through written, visual, oral and aural images, in text, art, icons, photographs, commercials, newspaper copy, advertisements, promotions, point-of-sale materials in retail stores, magazines, music lyrics and videos, billboards, movies, radio talk shows, news broadcasts, television shows and to an alarming degree on the Internet. The thousands of messages, subliminal and otherwise, which each of us take in daily make demonization, like any deeply-ingrained social phenomenon, hard to escape--difficult to identify and thus hard to reverse. Most worrisome is the possibility that we have grown numb to it.

Why have men and many *women* joined to collaborate in this ongoing negative use of language that stereotypes and confines both women and men? As a means of scapegoating, of evading responsibility for one's own actions; as a result of human insecurity; as a convenient way for people to rationalize to themselves the 'lusting in their hearts'. The need for humans to create a figure onto whom they can project their 'darker' impulses and their ensuing guilt seems to run throughout time and across cultures.

Ancient and modern societies have used the tactic of demonization for:

- its effectiveness in controlling, manipulating, exploiting and dividing girls and women to keep them powerless, pitting

Lilith against Eve, "good girl" against "bad girl"; its equal efficacy as a means of keeping one group, religion, or political party dominant over another;

- satisfying the human need to explain frightening or tragic events through the use of myth;

- rationalizing a mistrust of those who go their own way, those who are 'too independent' or risk being in the vanguard of new movements—and as a means of keeping them 'in their place';
- as a response to the jealousies and insecurities that lead to suspicion, fear of loss and ultimately the passing of moral and legal judgments on one's peers or perceived inferiors. This was illustrated in the extreme by the witch hunts of the Middle Ages, when healers were accused of being witches simply for growing herbs or performing the functions of a midwife; witch hunts continue today in many modified forms which may not always end lives but surely ruin them.

I hope to help bring about a greater understanding that portrayals of mythical or real women as innately evil undermine the self-confidence of all women, and in turn their ability to take risks, assume leadership or claim power, from bedroom to boardroom.

As I move through this work, I look at the 'power over' systems first named by Starhawk (1982), and examine the use, rationale and soul-killing effects of behaviors sanctioned by the dominator model we inherited (Eisler, 1987). I share their belief that the psychological patterns of domination and submission created by this model and played out daily--at home, in the workplace, within our legal system, and in relationships--distort what is beautiful, create

artificial constraints and dis-color our perceptions of natural Life processes.

I conclude with a hopeful look towards the future, which for me includes a vision of women serving as change agents within their religious, civic, social and business communities—a process which has already begun. It is hoped that this document will help women to name and value functions they already perform, and as a transformational tool to help women recognize, use, and appreciate their own erotic lifeforce to create positive change in their lives. I trust that in the process, I shall also define what, for this modern-day Lilith, is sacred and what is profane.

"There are no facts, only interpretations"
- Friedrich Nietzsche

III. INTRODUCTION

Whose worldviews shape our own values and belief systems? Whose history and judgments do we live by? These are critical questions thinking people must ask themselves again and again as they move through life. I believe that the very foundations of our lives are built on a deceptively safe legacy of carefully filtered information and biased translation, on data often distorted by the interpreter. The resulting 'history', whether carved in stone, written on papyri or printed electronically has had such incredible, at times imperceptible power to inform and persuade it has rarely been questioned.

This body of knowledge on which our culture rests has been created and handed down by a long line of largely white male or male-centered historians, archaeologists, theologians, clergy, anthropologists, scientists, psychiatrists, artists who identified with the dominant culture and sociologists. Their view of the world—often held out as "objective" and scientific--carries their own personal viewpoint, as is inevitable in any writing or reporting endeavor (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Reinharz, 1992). Yet it is this knowledge base from which all our thinking and social behavior emerge. I believe this necessitates an ongoing re-evaluation of the texts and images on which we reflexively base our lives.

There is a need to educate people—all people—to understand that we also derive our values based on the creation myths on which we are raised. In the Jewish and

Christian traditions that formed most of us in the West, these myths and their interpretations are male-dominated and often misogynistic.

Feminist liberation theologian Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza puts it this way in her anthology The Power of Naming: "While androcentric scholarship takes man (male) as the paradigmatic human being, feminist scholarship insists on the reconceptualization of our intellectual frameworks in such a way that they become truly inclusive of women as subjects of human scholarship and knowledge on the one hand and articulate male experience and insights as a particular experience and perception of reality and truth on the other hand" (Fiorenza, 1996). It is our responsibility to hold this awareness at all times, and to communicate it to others, whether or not they agree or understand. It is not an easy task.

Dale Spender expresses a similar awareness when she writes: "Many of my concerns are not only with what men have left out of their records, but with their assertion that what they have created is a full and accurate account...All knowledge, every record, is by definition partial...there can be no *one* view, no *one* answer, no *one* record that can take all the diversity of human experience into account" (Spender, 1985).

Since my inspiration for this work has been the mythical figure of the 'dark goddess' Lilith—a symbol of the independent, rebellious, sensual, courageous, passionate, truth-seeking, activist potential in us all--she is my starting and focal point. According to Jewish legend, Lilith was Adam's first wife and Eve's predecessor. In the most

commonly-told version of the tale, she is made from the earth, as is Adam. For this reason, she refuses to lie beneath Adam sexually, and when he insists, she mutters God's secret name, leaves the Garden of Eden and Adam, and flies off to the Reed Sea [today called the Red Sea] to live her own life. After Adam complains to God about being alone and Eve comes into the picture, we learn—in traditional patriarchal recountings—that she is warned against the 'evil' Lilith and feels Lilith is a rival competing for Adam's affections. In a contemporary feminist *midrash* or reinterpretation of this legend, however, we see Lilith painted as Eve's counterpart, confidante and friend (Plaskow, 1979; in Umansky,1992).

Lilith is present in many cultures, occasionally as a goddess, child-stealer or demon, who might have been good or bad, then as child-killer and temptress; she has, at times, even been thought to embody or symbolize the devil and is often personified by Eden's serpent[1]. She is clearly intended to represent the "evil" inherent in all women—while male symbols of this side of our humanity often remain far in the background. Yet many contemporary women see in her the embodiment of the Goddess, Queen of Heaven and Earth, goddess of love and war, designations she shares to varying degrees with the Sumerian goddess Inanna, the Semitic Ishtar, the Canaanite-Hebrew goddesses Asherah and Anath, and Egypt's Isis. As a goddess of love, beauty and things erotic she is akin to the Greek Aphrodite and the Roman Venus; in her wildness and thirst for justice she and Bhadra Kali, the Hindu goddess, could be thought of as bloodsisters.

Lilith was created from the same earth as Adam, as stated earlier, but he expected her to submit to him sexually

and one imagines intellectually and in every other way as well[2]. Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, in her landmark work Black Madonnas (1993), calls Adam's treatment of Lilith "the first violence done to women". If one reads this as rape, as some writers do (Philips, 1984; Ostriker, 1993), one begins to view the Garden of Eden as more prison than paradise. No wonder, then, that Lilith left Adam and Eden.

In so doing--as Aviva Cantor wrote in the first issue of LILITH Magazine (1972)—Lilith chose loneliness over subservience.

The patriarchy's treatment of Lilith has been similar to its treatment of Eve. Both have been demonized - Lilith for her independence and open sexuality, and Eve for her quest for knowledge. The Zohar, the "Book of Enlightenment" from which late 13th Century Spanish-Jewish Kabbalistic teachings emanated, repeatedly links Lilith and Eve in their 'sinfulness', according to Barbara Black Koltuv in The Book of Lilith (1986).

We can trace Lilith's development through both art and text; through mythological as well as talmudic and apocryphal sources. They include: the ancient epic of Gilgamesh and the Huluppu Tree (Johnson, 1988); a 2400 BCE text referring to a Sumerian storm demon; the famous terracotta relief of a figure usually identified as Lilith (now thought by many to represent Inanna) known as the Burley plaque, circa 2300-2000 BCE; in Babylonian legends dating from roughly 1800 BC forward; in Aramaic incantation texts found in bowls around 600 CE in Nippur, Babylonia (Iraq), Arslan Tash (Syria) and Persia; in Talmudic references written around 400-500 CE and additional Rabbinic literature, midrashim and folklore from the 7th to the 12th

Centuries CE, in 15th and 16th Century European sculpture and woodcuts, in Kabbalistic sources beginning in the 12th and appearing through the 17th Century CE, in literature carrying her through to the present day.

The only actual Biblical reference to Lilith or 'the liliths' (male *or* female demons) is in the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 34:14); whether or not it truly represents this mysterious figure is a matter of conjecture (see section on "The Biblical Portrayal").

I find Lilith endlessly fascinating, and whichever legends about her one chooses to believe, she symbolizes both the best and the worst in women, both the desirable and the socially unacceptable attributes of 'the dark'.[3]

She is, for example, a sexy temptress on one hand; on the other, we have this notation from the Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend (1991): "In the Middle Ages it was considered dangerous to drink water at the solstices and equinoxes because then Lilith's menstrual blood drops down and pollutes exposed liquids"!

As Judy Grahn notes in Blood, Bread and Roses (1993), fear of menstrual blood and menstruants has been rampant in many cultures over many centuries; all are part of the backdrop which paint women's natural processes as dirty, 'unclean' or 'impure', frightening, dangerous, even deadly. Ironically, even as men, and women, gave this power to the menstruant, it made them feel revulsion. It is this kind of thinking which helps to break down young girls' natural pride and confidence, converting it to shame and embarrassment.

This is nowhere more clear than in Jewish tradition, which forbids a menstruant from making love with her husband. "To the Rabbis, sex at the period when the blood is flowing, was most strictly taboo. It made monsters…It attracted Adam's other dark bride, Lilith" (Shuttle and Redgrove, 1978). "This is only one instance of a taboo against sex at menstruation which is spread throughout all cultures dominated by men, both historically and at the present time…a taboo which approves only that half of the woman's nature which is concerned with childbirth and pregnancy (Shuttle and Redgrove, 1978).

Demonizing Lilith, and in turn all women, coupled with demonizing menstruation, creates a never-ending negative cycle of low self-esteem which will continue to perpetuate itself unless we recognize, name and reverse it.

And yet I find hope in new interpretations of the Lilith myth, such as those written by poet and mythologist Cosi Fabian. For example, in one of her talks, "The Banished Goddess: In Praise of Lilith" (1992), she notes: "Like Adam, she was made out of dust and menstrual blood--Adamah means bloody clay…" This reference to Adamah, "the female of Adam…the Hebrew feminine word for earth or soil" (Koltuv, 1986) shows menstrual blood as sacred, for it is part of that which gives Lilith life. As such, this passage provides quite a different reading of the Creation story, with vastly different consequences for women, from that of 17th Century Kabbalists who wrote that Lilith was created from 'filth and sediment'.

I also find hope in the genuine joy and comfort many Orthodox and some Conservative Jewish women claim to feel in continuing the tradition of menstrual separation. Orthodox Jewish tradition mandates total physical separation from one's husband for two weeks each month, concluding with a *mikvah*, a fresh water bath in which the woman must immerse herself before returning home for a sexual reunion with her mate. Many say this two weeks of abstinence is a time of rest, reflection and deepened spirituality rather than what might appear to the outside observer, myself included, as a shame-based or shame-inducing practice.

"Wings of Shekhinah, bringing flights of wisdom, journeys of learning, the pursuit of truth..."

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I was first introduced to Lilith at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York 13 years ago. I studied her for a short time, left her to return to corporate life, then came back to this work in 1995, largely as the result of having been transformed by several major descents, times in which I rode on "waves of disorientation, despair and chaotic turmoil" (Meador,1994).

I viewed Lilith at first with both curiosity and delight. Hearing about a female rebel within Judaism, a woman with a free spirit and liberated voice within what had been both my religion and my lifestyle, was exhilarating. As a religion, Judaism had long inculcated me with its image of a male god, its patriarchal myths and history; as a lifestyle, it had of course completely shaped my worldview. In addition

it was filled with the reward/punishment schema and the judgmental attitudes that seem to accompany any major organized religion. Another legacy I inherited was my father's mindset--as a refugee who fled Nazi Germany--to 'never make waves'. It was to be a highly detrimental mindset for me for many years, one strongly reinforced by this society's expectations for a girl's behavior.

I found Lilith's fearlessness to be a refreshing change of pace, a delectable breath of fresh air. If she was a windstorm, she was one I was willing and ready to encounter. Somewhere deep within me echoed the truth of her rebellion, her refusal to submit, her sexual desires, her liberation - of self, by self, for self. I recognized her love of life and search for truth, and found myself drawn to her like a magnet without being fully conscious as to why.

The need to plunge myself into Jewish studies at that point in my life was borne of an urge to connect to something more meaningful than a workaholic existence. I worked as a Senior Vice President in a public relations firm in Manhattan and led an extremely stressful life, most of which I loved at the time. It was not until I visited my sister for ten days on Kibbutz Ga'aton in the north of Israel in 1985 that I realized how burned out I was. To my surprise, I loved being in this garden paradise on the outskirts of terrorism, this Eden within a war zone. This reaction struck me and those I worked with as ironic, since I was an aggressive corporate executive with an admitted taste for the jugular.

In Israel I met my three-month old niece for the first time. Though I was at that point childless by choice, I felt for the first time that great void women without children are

'supposed' to feel. It came, I believe, not so much from maternal instinct as from the fact that I found myself caught in a frequently dissatisfying and very predictable life with almost no spiritual dimension.

On my return to the States I decided to throw myself into studying to mask the void. I chose Jewish Studies in particular because I had been so awestruck by the natural beauty and miraculous oasis of peace my sister had found within Israel, a country always at war.

I occasionally wonder why I broke off my connection with scholarly pursuits to return to a full-time business life. Perhaps it was partly because I enjoyed the power I imagined I had there, even though it was clear when I left my office that I did not carry that power in the outside world. Outside my concrete corporate tower, I was 'just another woman' to the man in the street. Still, I thought of myself as a person of privilege, and only later realized the meaninglessness of such privilege.

In 1986 a variety of circumstances led my husband and me to adopt a son. Three years later my husband was diagnosed with cancer, from which he died fifteen months later. Both were turning points after which my life was never the same. One event was life-affirming and magical; the other brought me face-to-face with Death in a way that was far more devastating than I could ever have anticipated.

Several other traumatic losses between 1991 and 1993 combined to force me to re-evaluate the ephemeral, precious nature of Life. Suddenly feeling I had no psychic or spiritual choice but to cut ties to the familiar and leap into

the unknown, I decided to take drastic action to enjoy whatever I could of the rest of my life. For me this meant leaving New York and starting anew; spending more time with my son; finding a career in which I could do something more meaningful to me. Although in many respects that period tore me apart, stripping away my flesh and hanging it on a peg next to Inanna's for a time (Meador, 1994) it was, I know now, the prerequisite to my subsequent ascent.

As my grief slowly lessened, my consciousness awoke. A rage which had coursed through my veins for years, often silently, turned to passionate activism, beginning with a Domestic Violence Volunteer training. That 40-hour program was, surprisingly, one of the most empowering, eye-opening experiences of my life. Instead of looking at the 'Other' – a secretary at the office, my sister-in-law, a woman I passed in the street – as recipients of violence, I had to acknowledge how deeply locked I myself had been into patterns of abuse. These came to my consciousness from several directions, as I identified my own power-driven, often disrespectful treatment of my staff, the manipulations of a controlling husband and the shame, guilt and occasional self-hatred with which I oppressed myself.

Looking back on that period, I realize I was in some ways a classic example of a person who has internalized their oppression, though I wore a mask that bespoke social, racial and economic privilege. Certainly I did not see it at the time; I had insulated myself well with a self-imposed blindness and anger. When these coping mechanisms failed, I made myself numb to the pain.

I had never quite identified the behaviors I lived with then as 'abusive', since many of them were reflected in speech, tone, body language and attitude rather than physical violence. I quickly learned during the training program that patterns of verbal, emotional and psychological abuse can be as lethal as a physical beating, and are often more insidious since effects can be longer-lasting and harder to identify. I had never thought of myself as being 'in denial' before; I learned that I had been kidding myself. I found great power in naming these patterns of speech/action, and knew my outlook on my life would be forever changed.

The more I began to examine my life the more I saw how certain patterns and incidents dovetailed with the experiences of many other women. Nearly every woman I shared classes with reported experiences of some type of sexual abuse or dysfunction, much of it incest and rape, some of it harassment or parental and religious teachings that had convinced them that natural desire equaled sin. I was initially shocked and remained horrified by the numbers.

I began to understand for the first time how widespread violence, psychological oppression and power imbalances are, and how these conditions can silently, over time, partially or completely destroy a woman's sense of worth.

My own struggle to define and value myself came in part from being raised to believe that 'descents' were to be avoided at all costs. Mistakes were invariably regarded as failures, and were not well tolerated. They could not be discussed calmly, even if one dared to admit them. This

created for me an atmosphere of frequent tension and approval-seeking. It led me to regard mistakes, mine and others', as shameful signs of personal inadequacy instead of as opportunities for personal or professional growth.

I bring both the old paradigm and a new consciousness to my work now; together they give me a greater appreciation of women's descents as well as our personal triumphs.

I still have not figured out all the reasons we often require crisis or trauma before we make major lifestyle changes, and imagine this will be a subject of interest to me throughout my lifetime. I would like to think it possible that human beings could make changes in their lives simply because they are not happy or fulfilled, but we often resist change or get complacent. Nothing seems to be as effective a catalyst for transformation as grief, shock, externally-produced unhappiness – a spouse asking for a divorce, for example, or the death of a loved one. I believe that taking charge of our own transformations, being pro-active in the outcome of our own lives, especially after a crisis, is what enables us to become stronger, happier human beings capable of making positive change in the world.

I am acutely conscious of how Judaic and Christian notions of "sin" have historically demonized women, repressing our sexuality and silencing our rich, life-giving voices and bodies. I am alternately amused and angered by the prevalent societal and parochial view of eros as 'evil' and hope to show how such thinking has warped our collective consciousness. I also hope to make evident the ways in which religious texts and icons have been used as tools for

social control. I speak from a postmodern framework, within which I view the very notion of sin--as defined by our religious institutions--as artificially imposed and socially constructed.

I believe that recognizing this construct for what it is can be critical for both women and men, and can be a path out of the darkness of demonization and soul suppression. Through my lens, it is a damaging, archaic concept which impedes our moral, emotional and sexual development, inhibiting our personal and professional growth as individuals and our well-being as a species.

In part I focus on freeing ourselves from artificial constructs - and revisioning the erotic as a route to doing this. I do not want to see future generations of women waste years of their lives trying to conform to society's view of what is right and 'proper'; being the proverbial 'nice girl' seems to offer few rewards, and can, instead, often rob girls and women of that which they need most, their sense of self-worth.

Trying to fit this mold simply maintains a double standard through which the already-privileged, already-dominant class can uphold a status quo of 'divide and conquer'. Such a system rewards yet punishes women for seeking approval, keeps us domesticated, malleable, afraid to explore our own wild natures. It masks what is truly erotic, keeps our own knowing from us and fills us with guilt when we find pleasure in anything self-generated or in things not sanctioned, not pre-approved for 'good girls'.

My hope for a world in which women collaborate more often instead of constantly competing is often restored by the relationships I have and those I have observed between women working together in academe, in social and political movements, in the arts.

Such collaboration can only strengthen the social foundation we are trying to construct for cultural change; it can empower and inspire women to judge for themselves what constitutes 'good' and 'evil'; what 'sin' is; what acts and images are beautiful, natural or erotic. We are at a critical juncture in our own moral and personal development, and must continue to work on both.

It is vital to our spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical well-being that we re-evaluate, deconstruct, and thoroughly reconfigure the model of domination which overshadows and rules our world. This model threatens the whole scope of our lives, taking forms from psychological and emotional manipulation to physical and sexual violence--within marriage, in the workplace, within organized religion. These mechanisms have been constructed in most societies over time to insure control of one group by another, and must be identified and changed if we are to build a peaceful society or to see true cultural transformation.

Instead of clinging blindly to a patriarchal Ten Commandments as our only blueprint for living, I would prefer to see us build new models for ourselves, in groups and in solitude, to write new 'rules for living' that have meaning for us. Perhaps we will end up with much the same set of rules but it is important that we empower ourselves by giving ourselves and each other the authority to

write in the context of our own lives today, and from the starting point of an innate sense of respect for Self.

To be able to critically examine the dominant paradigm while trying to find viable new alternatives requires a transformation, first, of our own consciousness. To this end, I will try to illustrate how Lilith—strong female archetype, spirit and seductress, goddess, renegade and priestess—can serve as a model of unlimited possibilities and social change.

Why do I write about a woman accused of being a murderess, a harlot, a witch? Because she has been used to symbolize the headstrong, sexually alive, independent woman as bad, to equate a free thinker who would not submit with one who is a demon, a madwoman. By understanding how the character of Lilith was formed by the human mind--in particular by male imagination and libido--and how prevalently this image of Woman is used against us, women can move from coma to consciousness.

It is important for each of us to do this work so that every woman can find her voice–the voice that comes with consciousness. I personally am driven by a long-suppressed voice within myself, by my thirst for social justice, my hunger for knowledge and a passion for Truth. At the beginning of this journey it amazed me that we had learned so little from our sisters, our mothers of the Women's Liberation Movement of the '60s and '70s. They told us then, they made the problems facing women abundantly clear and yet is as if we did not hear. At least I did not, and I am sure I am not alone. Those who were comfortably

ensconced within the patriarchal structure, or thought we were, were even less interested in making waves.

I recently heard Gloria Steinem say in a Stanford University lecture that we keep having to re-discover what we already know; we learn, but then forget and have to be reminded. I find it aggravating that so many of the problems uncovered and addressed in the '60s and '70s still exist to such a great degree. At times I experience an overwhelming sense of frustration, at other times despair at the apathy of women and men who think there are no social conditions in need of repair. Much of the time, however, I am hopeful that a more egalitarian way of being, a way of living in partnership is possible, as discussed by Riane Eisler in The Chalice and The Blade (1987). With the heightened awareness that comes from applying critical thinking, we can re-learn to value ourselves and our natural wisdom. Those whose thirst for knowledge drives them to cross socially proscribed boundaries, those who can maintain an open, non-judgmental heart and mind will find the courage and determination to reconfigure the dominator paradigm.

The figure of Lilith can show women how to do this. I find her to be a prime metaphor for the womanforce which, if properly harnessed, could create a social revolution with reverberations around the world. Increasingly I see signs that this transformation has, in fact, already begun.

Lilith as role model is a woman who serves as a catalyst for change. She can be a symbol—for women as well as men—of one who thoroughly enjoys being sexually free and jealously protects her own mind, body and physical,

emotional and spiritual independence. She doesn't run away from her rage when there is reason to be rageful, doesn't hide behind social conventions, isn't afraid of raising her voice or the retribution that act might bring. As Cosi Fabian notes, Lilith uses her rage to create change.

Contrary to the myths which name her a baby-killer, I would rather imagine Lilith as a spirit who connects women in sisterhood, who guards and helps mothers as they birth their children, as Elinor Gadon writes in The Once and Future Goddess (1989). Or, as Vicki Noble states in Shakti Woman (1991) "...years later I learned that Lilith was originally the protector of women in childbirth and...newborn infants. She was demonized only after the patriarchal transition and turned into a wicked child-stealer" (Noble, 1991).[4] Instead of instilling more anxiety in women already in the midst of a vulnerable life passage, would it not make more sense for women to have a female god figure—or symbol—to whom they could pray for strength during pregnancy and childbirth? Was Lilith named baby-killer to keep women from praying to or even *conceiving of* a female deity?

In writing this, I hope to show women how to find the wild-natured, autonomous Lilith in them and our selves, to appreciate the "Shadow" figure who questions authority, feels anger, challenges us, makes us creative, revels in her sexuality and so enables us to reach our full human and spiritual potential. I want to encourage women to speak to and not run from their Shadow, to become friends with that part of their nature instead of fearing it. For it is that fear, that pattern of avoidance at which we have become so adept

which propagates shame, unhappiness and stagnation, leading us into depression, despair and silencing.

One could take this much further to explore the differences between our Shadow side and the power of dark/ness, as do Betty De Shong Meador (1998) and Audre Lorde (Sister Outsider, 1984). In personal conversation (1998), Dr. Meador told me she believes our goal should be learning to transform the demons people associate with the darkness; that in this way Lilith can be a force for transformation. She defined the dark as a "vast reservoir of energetic forces available to us"--a very exciting concept to me--and Lilith as an image which "can guide us in our own development".

If we viewed Lilith as a positive embodiment of the dark, mysterious forces often attributed to the Sacred Feminine (Gimbutas, 1989; Christ, 1997; Marler, 1998; Starhawk, 1979; Sjoo, 1982; Long, 1991; Pirani, 1991; Hillel, 1998), we could start to appreciate the strength, power and beauty of those forces. I believe my own fear of the 'dark'—my inability to trust the miracles that can emerge from the chthonic powers of the earth, my own tendency toward linear, male, monotheistic[5] thinking which poses the dark as only a bad, evil or morbid place—kept me from exploring Lilith as a representation of sacred darkness. I now recognize the rich, complex potential of this place as an area calling for exploration.

Here is an example of one woman's fascination with the mystery and power of darkness. Who could not be intrigued by this passage:

"For each of us as women, there is a dark place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit rises, 'beautiful/and tough as chestnut/stanchions against (y)our nightmare of weakness/' and of impotence. These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through that darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep" (Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not A Luxury" in Sister Outsider, 1984).

Audre Lorde's work continues to inspire me, as does the work of such poets, writers, spiritual leaders, scholars and theologians as Mariam Baker, David Biale, Kris Brandenburger, Rita Nakashima Brock, Mary Daly, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Marcia Falk, Lynn Gottlieb, Suzanne Heschel, Michele Klein, Betty De Shong Meador, Alicia Ostriker, Judith Plaskow, Susan Weidman Schneider, Starhawk and Eli Yassif, to name just a few.

Like many of these people and many others I cannot name here, I believe that the notion of 'sin', with its religious and judgmental overtones, is used to insure our compliance with a system we did not build. This concept serves little

purpose in influencing those who are genuinely evil, and only teaches the rest of us to be ashamed of what should make us proud, to feel guilty about enjoying that which is pleasurable. I therefore want to call attention to the internal split women often develop around issues of sexuality - the split from true self that occurs through guilt, shame, embarrassment. I do not discuss this from a strictly psychological point of view but from a view grounded in my own and others' observations about language and behavior.

Core to my philosophy of learning and teaching is the belief that women cannot move forward without the self-authorization that Gerda Lerner discusses in The Creation of Feminist Consciousness (1993). I tend to be suspicious of any interpretation of women's experience not written by a woman.

My primary sources for this work included the voices of feminist philosophers, teachers and poets as well as my own voice. Of course, my primary sources also included the bible, Talmud (Jewish scholars' commentary on the Hebrew Bible), Jewish pseudepigrapha, apocryphal texts and Kabbalah. Though I tried to give the apocryphal Old Testament and other non-canonical texts the same credence as others would give the bible or other literature within the accepted 'canon', at times I found and still find this to be difficult!

I anticipate an ongoing struggle within myself, between the patriarchal and the partnership sides of me, with the 'Shadow' self which still propagates and recognizes as positive the hierarchical patterns which dominate our business, academic, medical and other institutions. Being

tolerant of other ways of working and recognizing them as viable paths to success remains one of my greatest challenges. I also struggle with trying to be "objective" with Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Genesis story, a precursor to the myth of women's masochism and the myth

of male domination as "divinely ordained". I cannot help but regard the biblical book of Genesis as a myth, no more and no less than the apocryphal story of Lilith.

"In the beginning...God reached into the waters, formed a womb in her hand, and put it in the sky. Then, with her own breath, God filled the womb with Lilith, first woman..."

- Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb

IV. THE LIBEL OF LILITH – A MYTHO-HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The belief in Lilith-- known to us today as the first woman, the first Eve, Adam's first wife--has persisted throughout many cultures in one form or another for at least 5000 years. Lilith existed in mythology through art, iconography and oral and written traditions and was/is regarded alternately as goddess, protective deity and evil spirit, depending on which source one consults or chooses to believe.

I have not yet seen evidence of apotropaic amulets against Lilith dated before 600 CE but I believe they existed; there are incantations mentioning Lilith as demon which date as far back as 1894 BCE (Scurlock, 1991) and possibly earlier. Interestingly, although the Western world has changed drastically since that time, and we speak disparagingly of 'superstitions', protective amulets warding off Lilith or comparable 'evil' female spirits are still given to pregnant women, placed near the bed of a woman about to give birth or hung in or near the crib of newborn babies in a number of Middle Eastern and North African countries, including Israel, Morocco, Kurdistan and Yemen.

Yet Lilith still reigns as a symbol of independent, life-loving, justice-seeking women who have been depicted

in art, history and literature as sexual predators, demons, evil spirits and harlots. She may have been considered both warrior and seductress; I view neither of these as negatives. If she is shown as one who tricked men, I believe it was to teach them lessons; if she was blamed for inciting their lust, was this not engineered so men could find a way to give vent to their fears and fantasies?

If we are to believe she kills mortals, can we not view her as we do the male god, as one who 'giveth and taketh away', who ends human life as He, divine ruler, deems necessary, or simply to maintain the balance of the Universe? Why do the qualities we admire in a male god make so little sense to us when embodied by a female deity that we demonize her? Why are they so threatening?

In discussing Lilith's demonization and what I believe to be a false or incomplete portrayal of a fascinating woman and archetype, it is my strong desire to offer the reader alternative scenarios. In so doing, it is hoped that this work can guide women to find their erotic voices–to know what excites and stimulates them intellectually, emotionally and physically, and to pursue those things, especially their sexuality, without shame or reprisal.

In rediscovering this innate voice, it is critical to know history, in part to keep past travesties such as the European and American witch hunts from ever being repeated. It is not difficult to see the connection between the dogma of today's religious fundamentalists and Medieval attitudes connecting the devil and witchcraft which sealed woman's fate, as sentiments like this illustrate: "...to denounce women

became the means to protect oneself from the devil...if a religious man ...dreamed of a woman, that woman had to be a demon" (Van Vuuren, 1973).

The myth of Lilith, while perhaps created by men, was doubtless kept very alive by women as well, as a scapegoating device, by women who miscarried or were infertile, by others who may have been jealous or uncomfortable with their own sexuality.

I also think it highly likely that she was invoked by women who chose to self-abort--because they had been raped or did not want children--for courage, as a means of absolving themselves to themselves or to have someone to blame if their act was discovered. Fearing retribution from the husbands, fathers, clergy or legal authorities who ruled their lives, women could turn to Lilith as comfort or co-conspirator.

As to her reputation as baby-snatcher or murderess, I believe Lilith has rage, but I think she uses it, like Bhadra Kali, on behalf of those who need her help. I see her as an aggressive seeker of truth, a fighter for justice, one whose temper flares when she is lied to or otherwise betrayed. Unlike many, I see these as potentially positive, not negative attributes for women. The suppression of our anger has been as damaging to women as the suppression and denial of our erotic impulses. Trying to evade or repress anger has only caused us to avoid battles we need to fight to get the things we need and want in our lives--respect, good lives for our children, sexual satisfaction, equal pay and respect at work, challenging jobs free of harassment with the same potential for advancement as a white male would find, full

attention when we speak in either the public or private arena, and honored status especially for those who are mothers, teachers, nurses and elders.

I hope to prompt both male and female readers to think critically about the history they have been taught, and to read newspapers, magazines, books and ads with an open, questioning mind. In a time of electronic media bombardment, I hope also to encourage my audience to question the images to which they are exposed on television, at the movies or online. In so doing, they will, perhaps, re-evaluate and re-think what they have been taught about men and women, whether certain traits are innate or whether biology is destiny, as Sigmund Freud believed.

I also hope to help women create, re-vision and self-validate their own personal concepts of the sacred and the erotic; to locate their sources of creative juice, to decide for themselves where divinity lives. In the process of finding these answers, I believe women learn how much control they have over their own lives.

Who was Lilith?

Lilith's name is etymologically related to the Sumerian word lil (wind), not to the Hebrew word laylah (night), as was long supposed; it is also translated as wind-storm and screech owl. Among her many names: Astarte, Lamashtu, Labartu, Lillake, Lilit, Lilitu, Lilithu, Mahalat, Abyzu, Ailo, Ardat Lili, Broxa, Gelou, Lalla, Ptrotk, Ostara or Eostre (the Goddess of Easter lilies), Belit-Ili, Belili and Baalat ("Divine Lady" to the Canaanites). Though some also confuse her with Lilu, the lilu-demons were actually *male* (Scurlock, 1991).

By the same token, though Lilith is frequently accused of being a child-killer, it was the *lilu,* not the *lilitu* demon which preyed on children! "Men who had died young became lilu-demons: '[Young man] who always sits, silent and [al]one, [in] the street; [young] man who cries bitterly in the grip of his death-demon; young man to whose fate silence was attached; young man to whom his mother, crying, gave birth in the street; young man whose body grief has burnt; young man whose god has evil[ly] [b]ound him; young man whose goddess has cut him off; young man who never married a wife, never raised a child; young man who never experienced sexual pleasure in his wife's lap[6] young man who never removed a garment in his wife's lap; young man who was driven out of the house of his father in law'...it was presumably because he longed for fulfillment as a father that the lilu-demon preyed on suckling children" (Scurlock, 1991).

Like the Sumerian wind demon found in the Sumerian king list dating around 2400 BCE (Patai, 1967) and its later Babylonian counterpart, Lilith was regarded as a succubus, or female version of the incubus. Lilith has been compared and confused with Lamashtu, the Babylonian child-slaying demon, Labartu, and I believe possibly with the Babylonian demon Pazuzu, a male with two sets of wings. For some unfathomable reason, Pazuzu is termed a 'benevolent' demon in some sources even though he was the "King of the evil wind-demons" (Roaf, 1990). It is true that in ancient times demons could be either good or bad--those who practiced Babylonian oil magic, for example, used oil to inquire of the gods *or* the demons what the future would bring, or to ask them to fulfil a certain wish (Daiches, 1913). Yet Lilith, often said to be another powerful demon, is *never*

referred to as good or benevolent! This may imply that the Babylonians understood Pazuzu's warrior nature to be advantageous because they could invoke him for protection, while in most female figures such power is interpreted only as threatening.

In postbiblical Jewish literature, Lilith was named as Adam's first wife. In the minds of many writing since the 1970s, she is referred to as the first feminist. In Hebrew literature there are at least two distinct forms of Lilith, according to Moses Gaster (1928), early 20th Century Chief Rabbi in England, who finds parallels to her in the charms against a child-stealing demon or witch present in Slavonic, Roumanian and Greek literature of the 15th to 19th Centuries. One form is Lilith, the first wife of Adam and mother of all the evil spirits, "Shiddim" [or 'sheddim'] in the world; the other is an 'evil spirit' who "appears in a book not later than about the tenth century" (Gaster, 1928).

The book which Gaster is probably referring to is the "Alphabet of Ben Sira", a piece of rabbinic aggadah or folklore written, by one of the most respected recent estimates, between the 9th and 10th Centuries C.E. in Babylonia (Yassif, 1984)[7]. After many incarnations and depictions as a demon of varying forms, in early cultures ranging from the Sumerian to Semitic to Syrian, Lilith was first portrayed as 'the first Eve' in this tale.

According to the "Alphabet", when God decided to create a female companion for Adam, he created the first woman out of earth in the same way as he had created the first man. The pair immediately began to quarrel because Lilith refused to lie beneath Adam sexually; she saw no

reason to since they had both been created from the same earth or dirt (Long, 1991; Matthews, 1992; Gottlieb, 1993). When Adam refused to compromise Lilith fled to the Red Sea to 'consort' with demons, according to most accounts, though this might be understood as the choice to live an independent life in which she could enjoy autonomy. Demetra George writes that she refused subjugation, and, as a wind spirit, flew away and resumed her ancient sexual practices by living at the Red Sea, or as many would interpret it, dwelling in a womb of power, of menstrual blood (George, 1992).

When Adam complained to God that she had left him, the story goes, God sent three angels, Senoy, Sansenoy and Semangelof[8] to bring her back to the Garden of Eden. She refused. When the angels then threatened to drown her, she swore that she had been sent by God and that although her 'function' was to kill babies, she would spare any child protected by an amulet or plaque with her name on it if they let her go. They did, but only after meting out drastic punishment. There are three versions of this punishment in the literature: 100 of her babies would die each night; she would be doomed to giving birth to children who were demons; or God would make her barren. All three options are equally frightening; this part of the legend was clearly

constructed to illustrate the horrible fate which awaited women who did not obey their husbands. No doubt this extended to one's father or priest—to any male who wanted to claim 'dominion' over the woman or women in his arena of control.

Perhaps Lilith's compromise with the angels in the legend was an attempt to comfort the populace, once this misogynist myth had been put into place, by letting them think an amulet invoking the angels could help protect them.

Here again we have many variations on the tale. Some say such a prophylactic amulet had to have all her names on it (she has at least 25 that I know of, and is reputed to have as many as 40 or more). Other legends (Patai, 1967; Koltuv, 1986; Klein, 1998) say the names of the three angels had to be inscribed on the amulet. E.A. Wallis Budge, in Amulets and Superstitions (1978) includes a drawing of an amulet which calls on 70 'great angels' for protection.

According to Moses Gaster the Lilith who is written about in the 10th Century is profoundly different from the one we have been talking about. She has either gained or lost power, depending on one's viewpoint[9]. "The names by which the Evil Spirit is prevented from doing any harm to the newborn child are no longer her own names, but the more powerful names of the angels who subdue the Evil Spirit" (Gaster, 1928).

There are numerous records of such amulets and 'demon' or 'incantation' bowls from Babylonia, Syria, Persia and other parts of the Middle East which bore incantations to ward off evil demons, most often Lilith, from women at childbirth. These probably date as far back as 3000 BCE if not much earlier, but the clearest records we have seem to be of those amulets made after 500 CE.

The amulets against Lilith were believed to offer protection to male babies during the first eight days of their life, and to female babies for the first 20 days of life. The commonly-held reasons for these time stipulations: Males were felt to be in need of protection until after they had lived through one Sabbath, or *Shabbat*; girls usually went through their naming ceremonies when they were 20 days old. Another theory regarding the males may be related to the ritual of circumcision or *b'rit milah*, performed on Jewish boys when they are eight days old. Is it possible that Lilith—who may have, in fact, been the male *lilu*—killed male infants during the first eight days of their lives to make a statement about circumcision being an anti-sexual, barbaric act? Or, if she did regard circumcision as connected to a covenant with God or as a parallel menstruation rite[10] might this not have been a way of showing her rage at being excluded/co-opted to both God and Adam?

In my reading of the legends about Lilith, she represents female beauty, sexual pride and freedom, independence, free thought, mobility of body, mind and spirit, the freedom to dream. The fact that she was also often written about as a 'wind-storm' is a positive for me, not a negative. Wind indicates movement, and might have simply represented her as a force to be reckoned with; today, it might symbolize someone who is 'a mover and a shaker'. In fact, 'Ruach', the Hebrew word for 'wind' also means spirit, which could mean the breath of life itself. Clearly the difference in our perception of Lilith and of ourselves as women is shaped by textual analysis and interpretation. It is easy to see how differently we might view women if women had been regarded for millenia as the very breath of life

rather than as the instigators of sin, or as 'filth and sediment' as the medieval Kabbalists taught.

For this reason I think it is vital that women continue to create new myths about Lilith, new religious and historical legends, new vocabulary. I would love to see a Creation play performed where the key players are, perhaps, Lilith as God and Eve as the First Woman. Lilith's opening words might be these lines written by mythographer and poet Judy Grahn (1987) in her erotically-charged poem "Descent to the Butch of the Realm":

Oh descend
Oh lower yourself to love
in the underground, the union
of a woman to one other
woman, not self to self
but self to other
self.

Slap your feet flat on the earth now,
heel first preferably, thrust
your pelvis forward
You see I am about to change
your center of gravity.

Madonnas & Whores

Nitza Abarbanell, in her book Havah ve Lilit [Eve and Lilith] (1994) notes that society has "for thousands of years derived from its collective unconscious the same

demons and images, gods and goddesses". This book seeks to identify, explain and question how one of the most dramatic of those figures looked at the 'beginning' of recorded time, and how her image has and has not changed in the 20th Century.

Abarbanell draws on the figures of Eve and Lilith as a means of illustrating woman's personality, which she feels is split in many cultures. She speaks first of the woman [as] belonging to a man, the 'honest, dedicated' woman like Odysseus' wife Penelope - who waits forever and is willing to give up her life for her man. A second character (the 'other kind of woman') is 'the whore type', the independent type, the one who lusts and is seducer, the one who seeks and follows her own passion, the one loyal mainly to herself. Women like that are portrayed in Greek myth, she notes, as having no conscience (Abarbanell, 1994).

In most cultures this woman appears as not only the opposite of the loyal married woman, but as a woman of 'ill repute', bad reputation, no character – as a sinner, whore, harlot or witch. I find it both sad and frightening to observe that this artificial "Madonna/Whore" dichotomy remains as prevalent in 1998 as does our overall double standard, that what is right and even admirable for men is sinful and inappropriate for women. Indeed, Lilith is punished for having the same sexual appetites that Adam (may have) had.

Abarbanell writes that the Greek myth of Eros arose out of a need to explain the creation of the world. "They looked for a principle that drives Creation and thought they found it in love. Eros is a natural, spiritual power that promises the unity of the world as it exists, the unity of sky

and earth" (Abarbanell, 1994). While she writes that there are variations on this myth, she notes that in all of them Eros is always the source that brings life to the universe at its beginning. Eros is also the catalyst that brings out and sustains the lifeforce in each of us, just as Lilith, the 'wind-storm' can call forth our spirit, our breath, the wind beneath our wings. The suppression and theft of Eros and the erotic by the patriarchy therefore strikes me as soul murder.

Why has this occurred? Why have myths promoting misogyny, oppression, the subjugation and terrorizing of women been allowed to proliferate? Why has a male-dominated, 'power over' scenario reigned for the past five or six millennia when it has only benefited a segment of the population? Perhaps Nitza Abarbanell answers this question when she writes that our culture has suppressed Woman so she would suppress the Eros in herself! What happens with the women who were kept at home? What would happen when the Eros suddenly lit up in them? The woman would become dangerous to the man and, it was feared, might eat him alive! Thus, it has been considered important to keep this animal-like quality in woman dormant (Abarbanell, 1994).

I wonder why people did not insist on a return to the egalitarian living described by archaeomythologist Marija Gimbutas (Gimbutas, 1989) long before the politically impassioned '60s and '70s. There have always been a few voices in the wilderness over the centuries, of course, but I am speaking here of the majority of women. Why were we silent for so long? I believe it has been largely out of fear, and because we allowed ourselves to be convinced that we had no power. We gave it away, denied that we had any,

forgot the power of our blood, our birthright. I make this statement only with the intention to heighten awareness, to exhort women to claim their power, not to 'blame the victims' for their own oppression.

Overall, Abarbanell examines three themes in her book: the split of woman's character in patriarchal society, Eros as the energy of life, and the instinct or desire to do good versus evil (the *yetzer ha-rah,* evil impulse of destruction).

A big source of conflict in marriage stems from the concept men have about women and this good-evil duality, Abarbanell notes. Eve is the loyal, dedicated woman in the home. The other mythical figure, Lilith, the one with *yetzer ha-rah* is reputed to have desires which are sometimes satanic, full of lust. Not bound to anyone, she is a woman symbolizing freedom without boundaries. The man's own search for those dualities and his inability to be satisfied with only one of them leaves him caught between the two identities; he is torn between wanting a 'safe' woman at home, and his desire to break the mundane structures of domesticity. This leaves women, too, in an untenable position, causing them to have to choose between their Eve and Lilith sides, leading some to surrender their own identities to be the 'perfect' wife while others are driven outside the family structure to look for happiness, excitement or connection. Either way, Abarbanell says, the family nucleus is in trouble.

It is interesting to note that this "good girl"/"bad girl" dichotomy which both Western and Eastern societies continue to set up damages not just women, but men and the

family as well. Clearly, our mandate to re-vision and re-conceive our societal structures is an urgent one; the need to view ourselves and each other with different eyes, to reach fruitful compromises as we head into a new millenium is evident. If we are to become whole as individuals, if change is to manifest in our relationships, women must find a way to integrate both the Eve and the Lilith in themselves with pride instead of guilt, and men must learn to appreciate both sides of a woman's nature without passing judgment.

Needless to say, Lilith is not the only female mythical--or historical--figure who has been the object of libel, slander, twisted representation. She is joined throughout time by other powerful female figures both in myth and history, from ancient times to the present day. In contemporary times, one could mention a number of women whose degree of difference from the 'norm', indicated by a free spirit, 'aggressive' determination to succeed in business or an 'unfeminine' sense of independence stripped them of community standing, peer respect or love.

Such non-conformists might include 'sex goddess' and actress Mae West; dancer Isadora Duncan, writer Anais Nin; Cabinet member Jocelyn Elder, who lost her job for speaking frankly about the need to educate teenagers about masturbation; madam Sydney Biddle Barrows and Kelly Flynn, the pilot discharged from the Air Force for being one of the (probably thousands of) enlisted people having an illicit love affair. The open sexuality of these women was considered so powerful and threatening they were ostracized and characterized by both men and women as sluts, revolutionaries, deviants or incompetents.

Literary depictions of the mythical figure

Again I pose the question: who *was* Lilith? Sumerian goddess, an owl living in Inanna's tree, Babylonian demon, Armenian childkiller[11], Israelite sorceress, Canaanite slut, 9th Century legendary heroine or rebel, 13th Century Spanish witch, 17th Century Jewish nymphomaniac? Known over the millenia and across cultures by many different names and guises, this First Woman is alternately described in the Talmud as a notorious female night demon with a woman's face, long hair and wings; in various post-Biblical legends as a storm spirit, vampire and witch; in Kabbalistic literature as *the* symbol of sexual lust and temptation (Wigoder, 1974). She is often also said to appear disguised as the Queen of Sheba.

The Encyclopedia Judaica (1971) defines Lilith as a female demon who may be traced to Babylonian and possibly Sumerian demonology, which identifies similar male and female spirits, Lilu and Lilitu. It notes that these mazikim, or harmful spirits, have various roles. One of them, the Ardat-Lilith, supposedly preys on males; Lilu is a male demon who, strangely enough, has "no defined function"[12] and others imperil women in childbirth and their children. An example of the latter kind, the Encyclopedia says, is Lamashtu, against whom there were Assyrian incantation formulas.[13]

It seems likely to me that male counterparts or predecessors of Lilith may have been confused in translation or oral transmission of legends with a female demon. It also seems quite possible that female demons such as the Babylonian Lamashtu or Sumerian Lilith were blamed for

the acts or assigned the bad attributes of male demons such as the Babylonian Pazuzu, but never credited with such positive traits as that of protector. As in our time, actions regarded as positive when displayed by men, such as being a fierce warrior to protect one's followers, were only viewed as negative when present in women.

Raphael Patai, author of The Hebrew Goddess (1967), a comprehensive scholarly text on Hebrew goddesses writes that Lilith, a 'she-demon in Israel' of the 8th C. BCE may be a demon of unknown or unspecified origin similar to Lamashtu (Patai, 1967). This book is filled with fascinating information conscientiously gathered through many years of research, but is written from a rather traditional patriarchal perspective in many ways. Although I have great respect for Patai's scholarship and the vast legacy of work he left behind, I was disappointed that he did not question the overwhelmingly negative myths surrounding Lilith. I must acknowledge, however, the courage it probably took for a traditional male scholar to come out with a book on Hebrew goddesses in the '60s.

The myth of Lilith grew worse with the passage of time while 'civilization' became more entrenched in patriarchy. It served a social purpose, the same purpose fulfilled by blaming Eve or Pandora for succumbing to Temptation. It sets free-thinking women up as scapegoats, for both men and women; it is a vehicle through which women can be shown to be 'children', as wild irresponsible creatures who must be controlled. Keeping the insidious story alive allowed a continuation of the status quo and thus operated as a form of social control, much as traditional liturgies often do.

Barbara Black Koltuv brings some new light to the tale in The Book of Lilith (1986), a wonderful collection of stories and sources surrounding Lilith with many parallels into modern woman's thought process. Koltuv, a practicing Jungian analyst who interprets via client case studies, offers a rich array of parables, iconography—the amulets used to protect women against Lilith, for instance—and an entire chapter on Lilith's relationship with Eve.

Lilith's story is sometimes told now in classes about biblical women. While it is exciting to see Lilith brought into these discussions, in reality--quite surprisingly, given her mythical importance at the time the Bible was written--there is only one brief biblical reference (Isaiah 34:14) to either a character named Lilith, who remains undefined, or to the *liliths* (demons), screech owl or 'nightjar', depending on which translation one reads[14]. Isaiah, in describing Yahweh's (God's) day of vengeance when the land will be turned into a desolate wilderness, says:

The wild-cat shall meet with the jackals
And the satyr shall cry to his fellow,
Yea, Lilith shall repose there
And find her a place of rest. (Patai, 1967)

Or, according to another translation:

Wildcats shall meet hyenas,
Goat-demons shall greet each other;
There too the lilith ('a kind of demon') *shall repose*
And find herself a resting place.
(TANAKH, The Jewish Bible, 1985)

The fact that Lilith would be found in a desolate wilderness, an outcast living away from 'society', is often

referred to as proof of her demonhood. It is never portrayed as being the result of her choice. The fact that she has gone away from 'civilization' to find a place of rest, possibly renewal or reflection—as she did when she left Adam to dwell in caves by the Red Sea—does not strike me as necessarily negative, as biblical scholars have assumed.

Perhaps the reference is actually to Lilith as an owl, a symbol of wisdom. This may also have been the form she was in when she inhabited the Huluppu tree in the Epic of Gilgamesh (3rd Millenium BCE) before she was driven to or fled to the wilderness in that story.[15] Here again, her appearance does not seem to me negative or frightening, yet most translations suggest that whatever form she was in much displeased the Mesopotamian goddess Inanna[16]; she is alternately described as a demon (Patai, 1967), dark maid (Wolkstein & Kramer,1983) or maid of desolation (Kramer, 1944). Her very placement in a tree trunk may, in fact, reflect her connection with the Tree of Life; it may have represented her connections with the upper and lower worlds, with shamanic states of consciousness. An owl, too, may represent a shamanic or divine connection.

The Isaiah passage in the bible bears much closer examination than I am able to give it here, since it is offered frequently as proof of her demonhood[17]. If the text itself or the owl as symbol was indeed misinterpreted, a range of possibilities opens. The story may also show her as Inanna's "shadow side", as has been postulated. Or, as I came to believe in the year following the completion of my thesis, she may represent the demonization of a female godhead, in the form of Inanna. If so, perhaps it is from this story that demonization of women in particular begins; perhaps it is

from this story that Talmudic writers took their cues, beginning the justification for their treatment of women here and continuing it with the biblical reference and their imaginations.

We are not just talking, then, about setting up a paradigm in which women are automatically considered guilty, suspect or even evil—but one in which the ultimate mind control mechanism is created: the undermining of belief in the *possibility* of God as female. As Mary Daly wrote long ago, if God is male then males are [thought of as, to be treated as] God.

How differently we might have learned of Lilith, of women's power and our own mortality if the 'sages' had seen her in these passages from the Gnostic Nag Hammadi (2^{nd}-4^{th} C. CE) instead:

I am she who cries out,
And I am cast forth upon the face of the earth.
I prepare the bread and my mind within.
I am called truth...

I am the one who alone exists,
And there is no one to judge me.
For though there is much sweetness
in passionate life, in transient pleasure,
finally soberness comes
and people flee to their place of rest.
There they will find me,
and live, and not die again.

"Refuse to hand it down,
The legacy stops here."

- From a song by Melissa Etheridge

V. THE DEMONIZATION OF HER SISTERS, HER DAUGHTERS

The birth*wrong* shared by Lilith, Eve, Pandora - and the rest of us

Lilith and Eve have shared similar fates[18]. Both have been demonized – Lilith for one set of 'unacceptable' qualities, Eve for another. By the same token, within Greek mythology, Pandora was the one guilty of bringing sin, illness and all other evils to the world. Yet the self-determination reflected in Lilith's insistence on freedom, Eve's thirst for knowledge and Pandora's quest to satisfy her curiosity should not be suppressed; they are positive traits. Again, these same qualities in men are considered to be commendable, to show character and initiative.

If one believes that these women [Eve and Pandora] were created as an afterthought, as Professor Froma Zeitlin suggests, it is easy to see how their "secondary status operates as a signifier of difference and disruption that brings about the so-called 'human condition.' That is, she introduces death, woe, and evil into the world, along with the laborious toil of human existence" (Hawley and Levick, 1995).

Transforming Joy into Guilt

The sex act itself has been demonized. As I did my research, I often wondered what happened between the time

sex was expressed as a natural drive, enjoyed openly, without inordinate amounts of shame or guilt attached to passion-- and the biblical period, in which the sexual awakening of the "First Woman" as well as the First Man are portrayed as evil. It seems likely that this trend grew more intense with the teachings of Paul in the 1st Century CE. As he carried out his 'mission', the "Temptation, Original Sin and Fall began to seem the central tragedy of mankind...Eve's guilt appeared so great as to justify woman's subordination in life." (Hunt, 1959).

Hunt goes on to say that in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries, Christianity developed a fanatical fixation about "the glory of virginity, the evilness of woman, the foulness of sexual connection, and the spiritual merit of denying the flesh and repudiating love...in Revelation and much other early Christian writing, for instance, the terms 'fornication', 'lust' and 'whoredom' were used symbolically to refer to any and all sins against God" (Hunt, 1959).

This would explain the strong trend towards equating sin with evil and goodness with abstinence which occurred when the Church got involved in the private domain of marriage, thanks to the efforts of Augustine and others like him in the 4th Century. "Only a small percentage of Christians actually succeeded in sublimating their drives and leading lives of abstinence; the rest continued to lust and love, fornicate and marry," notes Hunt. "Gradually marriage came under clerical domination...Marriage, in short, had become indissoluble, but sexual self-denial stood above all else as the ethical way of life" (Hunt, 1959). By this time a new layer of Guilt was well on its way to becoming a permanent fixture in people's lives. Indeed, Chapter 5 in

The Natural History of Love is titled "Saint Augustine: The Victory of Guilt".

I find it interesting yet tragic that a man once so filled with his own passions as Augustine turned so fearful of his own emotions he joined the Church and set out on a campaign which so drastically changed the course of human events, particularly on the issue of sexuality. Episcopal priest and feminist theologian Carter Heyward notes that "the case could be made that Augustine's repression of his sexuality constituted also his denial of the love of God as the erotic power that he experienced in relation to women (and to men); and that consequently his legacy is indeed one of antagonism—not only to eros but also to God's love as our embodied, sensual desire to connect with one another" (Heyward, 1989).

By equating erotic power with the love of God, Heyward follows in the tradition of such women as mystics Mechthilde of Magdeburg and Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, a brilliant 17th Century theologian and nun. Hunt writes that part of Augustine's legacy was a climate in which "the influence of Christianity upon love and marriage [became] an impossible tangle of opposites—purification and contamination...the glorification of one woman and the condemnation of womankind...Sex became so sinful and disgusting that even within marriage, as an act allowed by God, it seemed shameful and more ignoble than elimination. Men and women hungered for it and hated the hunger, enjoyed it and felt guilty for the enjoyment" (Hunt, 1959).

Medieval attitudes connecting the devil and witchcraft sealed her fate, as sentiments like this illustrate: "...to

denounce women became the means to protect oneself from the devil...if a religious man ...dreamed of a woman, that woman had to be a demon" (Van Vuuren, 1973).

Cultural Consequences

This dichotomy, this internal conflict has created an anti-woman, anti-erotic culture. I believe that this judgmental mindset becomes a negative self-fulfilling prophecy; when we are filled with guilt and shame we only collude in our own oppression, denigrate our sexuality, deny and thus never fully discover what is erotic to **us** and what ways of being could give our lives greater meaning. We learn, instead, how to live in a state of involuntary compromise, of uncertainty, of confusion—and to accept these as normal or unchangeable states.

One of the gravest consequences of the various mythical and non-mythical demonizations of women has been the loss through distortion of a true sense of the erotic. As Luce Irigaray writes in thinking the difference, "Poor Eros! Poor love!" She believes that today's pornography trade promotes the notion that basic sexual pleasure is the definition of eroticism, and that humans are capable of nothing else.

"Eroticism is supposedly a drug for us, a means of forgetting ourselves...If you do not want to fall or sin, you abstain from sex. If you agree to fall, you can disguise the fall or atone for it by using it to procreate" (Irigaray, 1989). Small wonder that we are filled with so much shame, a shame that, sadly, is present in women whether we have

natural sexual desires and a healthy sex life, or experience a horror such as rape. The sex act itself, even when framed in the most loving relationship, is thought by many to be sinful and so produces both shame and guilt. The greater the enjoyment, the heavier the guilt. It is an onerous and totally unnecessary burden with which no one should have to live, one constantly reinforced by organized religion and those considered to be 'pillars' of our communities – the same pillars often caught cheating on their wives or discovered to have what they would classify as 'kinky' sexual tastes in others.

The irony inherent in this situation is that if these people were not such hypocrites, if they stopped judging and allowed others to pursue the sexual lifestyle most satisfying to each without recrimination, they themselves might be happier! I make the assumption here, of course, that such lifestyle does not involve harming others. If those who take it on themselves to dictate sexual mores did not perpetuate stifling notions of sex as sin and eros as evil, they might be able to find greater sexual satisfaction in their own relationships. As a society, we might be more open to learning that the needs of the libido can be satisfied not only through sex but also through work, in creative activities and through non-sexual physical pursuits.

Another damaging by-product of this artificial good/bad dichotomy, for both men and women, is the representation of things sacred as profane. For example, in distorting the true definitions of eros and the erotic, our culture suffers the heavy consequence of our feeling alienated from each other and worse, disconnected from Self.

Through the suppression of both ancient concepts and contemporary feelings of strong sexuality, we suppress the primal expression of raw energy and womanpower that might otherwise flow freely in our culture and heal many wounds.

By denying that what is openly sexual or free is beautiful, we have become so far removed from prehistoric and current images of true female beauty that we fail to recognize, let alone appreciate depictions of women in open, natural postures giving birth or exhibiting a joyful, unabashed sexuality. Yet is this not where true Eros lives?

Though we pride ourselves on the tremendous social progress we think we have made, surely Eros does not live in the exploitation of young women, nowhere more evident than in the sex slave trade recently exposed again as a thriving business in Asia, North America, the Middle East and other parts of the world. Our very humanity is denigrated if we allow ourselves to be silent witnesses to this activity, and yet businesses support this type of sex traffic on what I suspect is an alarming level. [Note: I differentiate between this type of trade, where the girls have no choice if they want to eat, may have been literally sold into slavery—ending up in a country where they may not even speak the language—or have no voice because of fear for their lives or the safety of their families, versus the free choice of prostitution as a profession by an adult capable of making her own decisions].

One current phenomenon in which sex is also treated as a non-erotic but rather pornographic commodity is in

plethora of unsolicited electronic mail messages from unknown sources offering sex and 'an end to loneliness' would be unnecessary if we were really an 'advanced' civilization.[19]

The ease with which this 'sex' appears possible and the fact that it portrays women as being available 24 hours a day to do any man's bidding at the flick of a finger is extremely disturbing. Through a focus on anonymous, faceless bodies and body parts it continues, on a mass scale, the objectification of women which Gloria Steinem, Andrea Dworkin and others were writing about 25 years ago.

"The inevitable and intrinsic cruelty involved in turning a person into an object should be apparent, but since this constricting, this undermining, this devaluing is normative, no particular cruelty is recognized in it... (Dworkin, 1979).

Moving to another consequence of objectification, it is painful for me to see how women still collude in their own oppression. Sandra Lee Bartky, in her book Femininity and Domination (1990) notes that sexual objectification "displays the characteristic marks of alienation" (Bartky, 1990). She says: "Sexual objectification usually involves two persons: one who objectifies and one who is objectified. But objectifier and objectified can be one and the same person: A woman can become a sex object for herself, taking toward her own person the attitude of the man. She will then take erotic satisfaction in her physical self, reveling in her body as a beautiful object to be gazed at and decorated... commonly called narcissism." She ponders the question of how feminine narcissism can be possible, though it is viewed

in psychoanalysis as a necessary feature of the 'normal' [quotes mine] feminine personality. "We can understand the *interest* women have in conforming to the requirements of sexual objectification, given our powerlessness and dependency; less easy to explain is the *pleasure* we take in doing so" (Bartky, 1990).

In her chapter "On Psychological Oppression"--which draws many parallels from Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks--Bartky refers to Fanon's categories of oppression: stereotyping, cultural domination and sexual objectification. She builds on the work of Fanon and others to broaden the definition to include the phenomenon of women's internalized oppression. Bartky's important book also includes a chapter on "Feminine Masochism" which describes our understanding and misunderstanding of power and the eroticization of domination.

Making domination as a way of life appear sexy, and the continuing demonization of women perpetuates the dominator-dominated model[20] so well outlined by Riane Eisler in The Chalice and The Blade (1987). This destructive model is also perpetuated by fear.

Demetra George writes about one of the fears that prompts this model in Mysteries of the Dark Moon (1992). She says that "Dark Moon Lilith" lives within each one of us, male and female, and represents our primal instinctive feminine sexuality; that the masculine part of each person both longs for and *fears* the power of this wild woman who is free and unrestrained in her animating, pulsating, transforming sexuality. (George, 1992) I believe this longing often leads to the pursuit of love and lust at any cost.

At the same time the fear of a loss of social/sexual control leads to a continuing hatred and mistrust of women.

By symbolizing an independent spirit who goes against conventional rules of behavior, Lilith presents us with a new role model, one which is perhaps more achievable and healthier than the impossible, confining standard Western culture has set for women to meet as Eve.

Attempts to Bury The Sacred Feminine

We come out of the womb in a ritual that, for the last 200 years or so, women have not been allowed to control and direct--even though we are the life-givers! We then move through childhood being given a number of subtle or not-so-subtle messages about nudity, sexuality, shame, what constitutes 'appropriate' behavior - this being defined differently for boys and girls. Through our teen years we receive an onslaught of messages, from parents, relatives, clergy, teachers and friends, many of them conflicting and most of them framing sex as something dirty, nasty, naughty, not to be talked about, producing not only confusion but shame and guilt. We speak of the birth process and menstrual bleeding as only messy instead of sacred. Little wonder that by age 11 or 12[21] girls suddenly begin to have major doubts about themselves. Teen boys still have guilt when they experience nurturing, tender or sexual feelings which are in fact healthy, normal and desirable. Yet there seems to be some measure of fraternal or peer support as they hit their mid- to late teens for the use of pressure or outright force as a means to sexual conquest, a focus on power rather than love.

Betty De Shong Meador notes: "Male-imagined culture separates us as women from our harmonious concordance with nature. Our bodies bleed with the moon...we are biologically attuned to instinct's dark realm. Unless we retrieve that connection consciously, we wander half-alive in someone else's skin" (Meador, 1992).

Knowing the vital importance of being attuned to that connection, I hope to inspire the reader to think about all the myths on which we are raised and our culture is based. I wish to also prompt an examination of the ways in which we perpetuate myth, both deliberately and unconsciously. As Bettina L. Knapp writes in Women, Myth and the Feminine Principle (1998): "Today's thinking persons may be encouraged to ponder -- if need be, to *re*consider -- their own frames of reference: ideations, religious beliefs, and pulsating emotions bound into their own lives".

"Myths generally attempt to bring order to disorder, to render comprehensible that which is incomprehensible, or to regulate what lies beyond one's control", writes Knapp. "Myths are generally believed to have been written by men, and perhaps that is the reason the portrayal and understanding of women in the mythical texts is sometimes rudimentary and distorted" (Knapp, 1998).

One can only speculate as to the full impact of Lilith's negative image and reputation on women living in ancient, medieval and modern times. But one can say with a fair amount of certainty that if we do not claim our 'dark' goddess, our naturally creative, erotic natures as well as our fury, pride and laughter we may be dooming ourselves and our daughters to spend the *next* 5000 years believing eros is

evil and that we as women are responsible for the fall of humankind.

Dr. Rachel Hillel, an Israeli analyst aptly writes: "The loss of sacred femininity to contemporary consciousness is psychologically very significant...The feminine's essential meaning to the human psyche is reduced when the sacredness of the vulva is unacknowledged and denied." She goes on to say that the "erotic-sensual feminine energies, personified by the ancient sacred priestess in the Goddess' temple" were vehemently persecuted for two millenia and are no longer known (Hillel, 1997). I do believe these energies are being rediscovered by women daily, however, and that gives me great hope. I believe we will have made true progress towards realizing our potential as a civilization when we can own them openly.

For now, the ways in which sexual morality is defined for us instead of *by* us turns everything inside out and upside down, creating impossible role models. We find ourselves in a hostile, unforgiving, judgmental environment, enveloped in a chaos ruled by masculine forces instead of a more natural, flowing, sensual feminine order and harmony. As Anne Wilson Schaef described in her powerful book Women's Reality (1992), the "original sin" of being born female is an assigned inferiority, a sin from which we can **never** absolve ourselves!!! It occasionally makes me wonder why we even continue to try - risking and often losing our personae, our children, our strength, our focus, our very lifeblood in the process. Yet 99% of the time I know that we must try as long as we have breath and the power of speech, or forfeit a genuine life.

Schaef continues: "Somehow, we believe that if we are just good enough, we will be absolved of our Original Sin of Being Born Female. It never works... Women have let men set the ground rules surrounding sex since sex has traditionally been considered men's prerogative and since men are supposed to know and understand everything. We let men tell us how to feel, behave and respond" (Schaef, 1992).

The attribution of 'Original Sin' to Eve and so to us all is as damaging to women as the demonization of Lilith (whom I have interpreted for the past six months as a demonized Inanna). Activist theologian and radical lesbian feminist writer and teacher Mary Daly defined *Originally Sinful Acts* in her legendary book Wickedary (1987) as: "Natural Acts proceeding from a Prude's Self-centering Lust; Acts of questioning and challenging the old saws/laws of the Lecherous State". The example she gives is Rosa Parks' defiance of Alabama's segregation laws in 1955.

She characteristically goes a step beyond traditional Christian definitions to identify *Original Sin of Women* for us in a whole new light: "The Original be-ing of women, from which patriarchal religion attempts to "save" us, but which is inherently Untouchable, Inviolable and Wild." She also defines the 'original sin of women' as:

> "State of complicity in patriarchal oppression that is inherited by women through socialization processes; socially transmitted dis-ease involving psychological paralysis, low Self-esteem, hatred of Self, emotional dependence, horizontal violence, and a never ending conviction of one's own guilt" (Daly, 1987).

The notion that we should suppress what is erotic in us and to us finds a good counterbalance in this passage written by Starhawk, a Jewish pagan feminist writer, activist and spiritual leader: "The image of the Goddess strikes at the roots of estrangement. True value is not found in some heaven, some abstract otherworld, but in female bodies and their offspring, female and male; in nature; and in the world…Human nature, needs, drives and desires are not dangerous impulses in need of repression and control, but are themselves expressions of the order inherent in being. The evidence of our senses and our experience is evidence of the divine—the moving energy that unites all being" (Starhawk, 1982). I could not agree more.

Comparing the "Almighty" (male) god, Starhawk writes: "The Goddess… represents women's authority over our own life processes, our right to choose consciously how and when and what we will create. The female image of divinity does not, however, provide a justification for the oppression of men" (Starhawk, 1982).

Responsa:
Liturgy for Lilith
- Cosi Fabian (1991)

I am Lilith, Grandmother of Mary Magdalene
I am Lilith, whose sexual fire was too hot for God.
I am Lilith, the First Woman, who chose the rage of exile over the cancer of servitude.

I am Lilith, Mother to the mother-less.
I am Lilith, whose blood covers the moon.

I am Lilith, standing on owl's claws at a woman's crossroads.

I am Lilith, the Whore in the gateway of the Temple.
I am Lilith, whose serpentine tongue caused Eve to laugh, and pick the apple!
I am Lilith, Revolving Sword of Flame – scorching hypocrisy from truth's white bones.

I am Lilith, free-moving in the Wilderness.
I am Lilith, spirit of night and air.
I am Lilith, in whose dark caves transgressors find sanctuary.

I am Salome.
I am Morgan le Faye.
I am the Queen of Shayba –
My hair is black, and I am 'dark but comely',
(Solomon sang my song!).
My hair is red and my skin, ivory.
I am Eve's big sister.

I am Lilith, Mother to the motherless.
I am Lilith, whose sexual fire was too hot for God.
I am Lilith, living in the Shadow.
Waiting. For you.

I believe Fabian's work, which ranges from poetry to playwriting, provides us with exciting new images of Lilith and of sacred sexuality. Fabian, who refers to her former

profession as that of sacred prostitute, gives us Lilith in a new, strongly feminist light. She portrays Lilith as bold, proud, openly sexual, irreverent, enlightened, righteously rageful at times and unquestionably empowered—adjectives that also happen to apply to her.

Turning Original Sin Inside Out

A variety of shame- and guilt-producing accusations are among the damaging effects of the insidious social

construct known as "sin". While conscience serves as a useful mechanism for self-regulating our behavior as humans, when artificially induced by social mores and religious authority I find both to be damaging constraints for the human psyche. This is simply one more reason it is critical that women pull together, that we share a vision and work towards it in unity. The longer we allow ourselves to be separated, dominated, isolated, the longer real change will take. For me, an empowering vision can be portrayed as a model of ten elements, inspired by the ten sefirot, or energy essences, on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life central to medieval Jewish mystical thought.

Re-visioned from a feminist standpoint, one might reconfigure those elements to create an erotic Tree of Life—though I recognize there are many wonderful lessons to be learned from the sefirot as they are portrayed in Kabbalah. In my tree the elements of fear, shame, guilt and violence so present in our culture are notably absent. A Kabbalistic scholar would immediately point out that such negative elements are by no means espoused on 'their' tree, and that would be true.

However, the exclusion of women from the study of Kabbalah, the ban on teaching us the meanings of the sefirot, the refusal to allow women to study Torah until the 20th Century are all part of the same patriarchal overlay. Together, they were part of the oppressive machine which prevented, often forbade the education of women–and many men—until the mid-19th Century. Women were not allowed to be ordained as rabbis until the latter half of this century, although a few intrepid souls managed to study hard and persist enough to be ordained privately. This exclusion from study, from acquiring and creating new knowledge has kept us from constructing lives in which divine humanity, independent thought, sexuality, creativity, bold visions and the Sacred Feminine are celebrated and honored on a daily basis.

Some Kabbalists are quick to argue that Judaism 'allows' for a female divine presence, since Shekhinah represents the female side of God. No one calls God the male side of Shekhinah, however, and often Her name is completely absent or shown at the bottom of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, leaving Her as a silent or unequal participant.

As scholar Elliot Wolfson notes, "the divine androgyny is primarily male...Despite the larger role accorded the female in kabbalistic mythology, the female continues to be subordinated to the male" (Wolfson in Silberstein & Cohn, 1994).

Wolfson continues: "... when the female is separated from the male, or when the female is treated as an autonomous power... the female either comes under the dominion of the demonic or it assumes a demonic character".

He cites passages to support this statement from the primary Kabbalistic work, the *Zohar*. Most telling of all is his observation that "The demonization of the female is also expressed in terms of the male becoming female, i.e., the impotent or celibate male..." (Wolfson, 1994). This damning concept has been repeated by men from Aristotle to Freud, in their assertions that women are no more than mutilated, castrated or otherwise imperfect or incomplete males.

Kabbalistic writings, then, are part of the canon which propagates the belief that male 'power over' everything in the environment is 'the natural order of things' - and that, therefore, violence against women and children is justified. In other words, as Susan Griffin (1979) and many other

feminist writers have aptly pointed out, the notion that man has the 'preordained right' to control and direct Nature has always translated into male domination of women, and this erroneous thinking has led to an implicit sanctioning of domestic violence. It began with the writing of Genesis and all the Judaic-Christian interpretations which have followed, for it is in Genesis that we see the theoretical basis for vindication of male rule as 'authorized by God'.

Some pentecostal women seem to have internalized this philosophy, as evidenced by the very title of a book on the activities of the Women's Aglow Fellowship--God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission (1997). Based on my admittedly limited knowledge of Pentecostal women's thinking, this strikes me as a concept quite different and less self-actualizing than the

power of surrender, which I believe can be a meaningful, often transformative component of genuine religious and mystical experiences.

In the next chapter, I try to show women possibilities beyond reflexive submission.

"Your silence will not protect you."

- Audre Lorde

VI. A RESTORATION TO CONSCIOUSNESS: Reclaiming the Erotic as Sacred Lifeforce

This chapter looks at some of the wonderful work done by a few of the second wave feminists who brought us to our own attention and contributed so much to the existing body of knowledge through their writing and lectures during the last 25+ years. It also looks at the 'third wave' and is intended in part as an appreciation of the work of all the women who are leading us to and through new frontiers to a more egalitarian, intelligent, sensual and sexual way of being. It is a hopeful look forward to the possibilities envisioned by my generation of scholars, for ourselves and the children we are raising to lead us into the new millenium.

It is exciting to be alive at a time when so many explorers—from women spiritual leaders, writers and performers to feminist scholars, sex workers and theologians—are creating new imagery, liturgy, role models and scholarship. The work of all combines to form a beautiful mosaic, an intricate, layered web of riches to which we can add our own individual contributions.

The writings of mythologist/sex activist Cosi Fabian and artist/ritualist Maura McCarley are just two inspiring examples of the fresh new thinking which can lead us to re-vision icons, people and behaviors previously defined as sinful, disgusting or shameful.

Contemporary thinkers redefine sin, re-vision the erotic

The Lilith *midrashim* or reinterpretations written by Judith Plaskow, Ellen Frankel, the Lilith poems and prose of Enid Dame, Lilly Rivlin, Henny Wenkart, Lynn Gottlieb, Alicia Ostriker, Susan Sherman and others, the writings of Carter Heyward, Audre Lorde, Anne Bathurst Gilson, Rachel Hillel, Marvin Ellison and Jalaja Bonheim have all helped to re-frame the definition of the word 'erotic'. Their work paves the way for Western cultural healing, since the warped usage of this word is at the root of many of our culture's ailments, such as the portrayal of women and of male-female relationships in rap music videos.

It is empowering for women—and men—to learn that our *best* senses of the erotic can be found in our work, in music, in dance, in poetry, in song, in sports, and as Betty De Shong Meador (1976) has said, in family relationships. The erotic is *shakti*, our passion, our sexuality, our kundalini energy, our creativity—our very lifeforce. Contrary to the way our culture has defined it, the erotic is not the connection of sex with violence, nor is it the celebration of bloody wounds incurred or inflicted on the battlefield.

We have seen the killing of men and rape of women portrayed as both entertaining and erotic in film and art, from the throwing of Christians to lions to the rape of the Sabine women; our language abounds with metaphors reflecting our fascination with death, such as 'sudden death' plays in football. From bloody gladiator sports in the Coliseum to a boxing match in which one man bites off another's ear; from

the rape of the Amazons to the killing and rape of plantation slaves; from the torture and rape of Nazi and Bosnian camp prisoners to the horrors visited on women and men during the Medieval witch hunts and Inquisition; from the rape and imprisonment of Rwandan and Afghani women during war to the terrors of gang life on American inner city streets today—all are variations on the same inhuman theme: 'man' at his most savage and evil. To see any of these events eroticized, treated as sport, as 'normal' or acceptable exercises in power is a sin against humankind, as are the apathy and silence that allow them to continue.

Sadism—which certainly played a role in all these activities--is greeted as erotic in the literature and life of the Marquis de Sade. In the Malleus Maleficarum, handbook of the self-appointed judges who ran the Inquisition, both sadism and the demonization of women took on new and horrifying proportions. Sadism, one of the factors driving the use of persecution, torture and rape as political weapons is perhaps the cruelest of all dimensions of the 'power over' paradigm. It appears and reappears throughout history, often under the guise of religious and civic authority, and is made all the more heinous when the perpetrators accuse the victims of inviting the act, or worse, deserving or enjoying the pain involved.

Yet it continues to titillate. How can such twisted views of the erotic self persist while we mock and even outlaw natural expressions of love[22]?

My own interest in re-defining the erotic crystallized as a direct result of reading Audre Lorde's powerful essay "Uses of the Erotic".

"The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives". (Lorde, 1984).

Is it any wonder women have such trouble locating our own power? Is it any wonder that we give it away so easily? We are never taught that power belongs to us, and if we feel the slightest hint stirring, we immediately deny it or squash it as a "bad" or "dangerous" feeling. It becomes easy for an oppressor to steal what we feel guilty about owning. For those of us who enjoy power, there is guilt and often an inability to claim our rightful share.

There is danger to women in ignoring such erotic impulses. If we instead learned to appreciate and enjoy without guilt both our sexual pleasures and our ambition--which we have been taught are selfish or inappropriate for women to pursue--they would energize and enrich us. To suppress our *shakti,* the primal energy which is our very core means resigning ourselves to lives of emptiness and frustration; without a healthy outlet for our erotic juices our minds atrophy and our spirits wither.

"As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge," says Lorde. Indeed, men used to dismiss "women's intuition" as either silly or irrelevant. They no longer laugh at the concept; instead, they build entire management systems around it. We must remember that "the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough". Lorde notes that the erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women; that "pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it...emphasizes sensation without feeling".

"The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic or intellectual forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference" (Lorde, 1984).

Lorde's description of how a sense of the erotic opened up her capacity for joy is in complete alignment with my own thoughts and experience. Yet without her words I might never have identified my own human potential as being tied to the erotic in all its senses.

On a visceral level I had identified certain activities and feelings as erotic, but my view was a much narrower one limited to sexual references, physicality and sensuality, bereft of spiritual, intellectual or emotional dimensions. I knew instinctively there was nothing erotic about what most in our society casually and automatically term 'erotic'; I

knew, too, that I often found those activities offensive, invasive, empty, demeaning and lacking in humanity.

In another reference to how we twist the sensual dimension of the erotic into something ugly, feminist healer and teacher Vicki Noble writes about the phenomenon of living in a culture that perceives rape as sexual. "We are inundated with imagery and advertising that use women's bodies and our erotic energies as lures to sell products and to lull people to sleep" (Shakti Woman,1991). She speaks of the ancient caverns of the Paleolithic era in 30,000 BC, when "the vulva was the first religious symbol, representing the doorway, our entry into life…our ancestors carved vulvas on cave walls, on rock, over doorways, and finally in temples." This type of awe, this respect for the Great Creatrix and Life's most beautiful, sacred aspects has been taken away, distorted, corrupted and shamed. "Women in ancient cultures were free in ways we can't imagine. Their sexuality was innately connected to their spirituality. How can this wholeness be understood by a people in whom the two are irrevocably split?" (Noble, 1991). She asks: "How are we ever going to find our way back to the garden [of female-centered sexuality]?"

I think one of the most important, effective ways in which we can find our way back is by trying to remember with our cellular memory how it felt to view sexuality as spirituality, and the sacred as erotic. Seeing the world through those mindsets again could bring major change, and would certainly be one step toward healing the artificial, unnecessary split between Eve and Lilith, "good girl" and "bad girl" and then, one hopes, the chasm often dividing men and women.

Re-visions

Respected feminist theologian, professor and domestic violence activist Rita Nakashima Brock defines what many of us would call erotic power in her book Journeys By Heart, A Christology of Erotic Power (1995). "In the feminist vision, Eros is both love *and* power", she notes, and this Eros encompasses the "life force". This is in dramatic contrast, as she shows, to the patriarchal definitions - in which, for instance, love and intimacy are tied to aggression, possession and domination - and in which Eros is often equivalent only to lust or sexuality. She points out, and I wholeheartedly agree, that "Eros is a sensuous, transformative whole-making wisdom that emerges with the subjective engagement of the whole heart in relationships. Erotic power is the power of our primal interrelatedness."

To allow the continued theft of what psychologist Rachel Hillel (1998) calls our 'erotic soul', to know that it is disguised, disfigured so terribly we cannot recognize it—or to be penalized when we do find it in our lives and celebrate it—these are the true sins, the crimes against humanity. If we view life as sacred, they cannot continue. Our consciousness and in turn our actions, must undergo major shifts if we are to create a culture based on respect instead of fear, peace instead of violence, eros rather than exploitation.

We can work to create such shifts by listening and thinking critically, by writing and creating new social/religious forms in different aspects of our lives.

"Our cultural view of masculinity is informed by men speaking and writing about themselves and their experiences.

So, too, our cultural view of femininity is shaped by men speaking and writing about their experience of women...Until women speak and write with authority, cultural conceptions of men, women and humanity will be but pale ghosts of reality. Fortunately, women now are articulating and publishing their own definitions and descriptions of life, of children, women, and men, and of the relations among them. (Sterk, in Van Leeuwen, 1993).

Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza notes in The Power of Naming (1996), "by critically reflecting on their own location within institutionalized biblical religions, feminist theologians are able to claim their own religious voice, heritage and community".

Womanspirit Rising (1979), edited by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, was one of the first sources I read when I first studied Lilith in 1985. Plaskow's scholarship over the years has been excellent, making her a wonderful role model; in 1998, she has expanded this model by being named president of the prestigious American Academy of Religion. Her inspirational *midrash* interpreting the traditional myth of Lilith, together with the work done by Aviva Cantor and LILITH Magazine, set the stage for later modern-day interpretations and a new attitude towards Lilith's story and character.

Renee Rosen, creator of the online "Lilith Shrine"[23] has also helped to bring this powerful goddess-woman into the light of modern day consciousness. She tries to present many sides of Lilith's character by including links to sites offering standard historical material as well as her own feminist analysis and writing. In creating an ongoing online

dialogue about Lilith, she has provided a space where old myths can be countered by new interpretations.

As I have said, one of the most omnipresent myths pervading our culture is that of the "good girl" and the "bad girl". Almost from birth, girls are faced with a constant dilemma as their personalities form: the paradox of choosing either to be "good" or "bad". As Schaef, Steinem and many others have said, it is an artificial choice, a social construct which has been a no-win situation for both girls and women. Our only hope for wholeness lies in the integration of both our Lilith and Eve characteristics.

"A woman becomes a sexual object...because she is taught that it is only through her sexual attraction that she is permitted any influence," notes Dale Spender in For The Record (1985). Women have known this for centuries, and many have taken this route to power and influence, only to be simultaneously damned for doing so. Surely the use and alleged misuse of sexual power is confronted daily by every female executive, every woman in Washington, every woman who is successful in pursuits outside the home. "Women are therefore given a most difficult feat to perform," Spender continues. "On the one hand, they are enjoined to get a man, but on the other hand they are forbidden to do anything active about getting him" (Spender, 1985). This sentiment is echoed by Naomi Wolf in Promiscuities: The Secret Struggle for Womanhood (1997).

A wonderful description of the pitfalls awaiting girls and women who constantly strive to fit into society's definition of "good girls" can be found in Good Girls Go To Heaven, Bad Girls Go Everywhere (1994) by German author

Jana U. Ehrhardt. Ehrhardt is right on target in her portrayal of the self-defeating mental models - such as "Learned Helplessness" and "Self-Fulfilling Prophecy" - that can govern our lives if we do not think critically about our own and others' behavior. Ehrhardt also talks about how we can improve our job performance and general life satisfaction by being more cognizant of our inner processes and not getting caught in mental traps such as "Helpfulness Will Be Rewarded" and "Only Someone Who's Exhausted Has Really Accomplished Something!"

Happily, she also proposes various strategies to counteract the cultural dictates that have lead many women to fear power and risk, inhibiting their development and progress in the workplace.

I believe women can be taught to assume power more easily and to enjoy risk-taking; one way of doing this might be to teach our daugters greater self-determination and pride in their womanhood at an early age. After studying Judy Grahn's metaformic theory, which posits that all culture grew out of women's menstrual cycles and rituals, I realize the importance of celebrating menarche, a girl's first period, as one way of doing this.

Grahn's book Blood, Bread and Roses (1993) makes clear the importance of ritualizing and marking menstrual rites from menarche to menopause in positive rather than shame-based ways. In it, she states that our foremothers created what she calls *metaform*, an act that makes a connection between menstruation and a mental principle. "Our ancestresses taught via menstrual instruction, through rituals that embodied ideas based on menstrual information"

(Grahn, 1993). Is it not time we returned to the past to find our future?

Metaformic theory is a theory both women and men should learn; it is one of the elements which could help us make a major paradigm shift. This might occur for two reasons: a) men might learn to honor and value women more *and* better understand their own rites of passage, and b) it gives women a clearer understanding of *who we are* – and teaches us that from a perspective we cannot ignore. That can lead us to value ourselves differently, far more than we were ever taught to in the past, and if we can impart that sense to our children, there is indeed hope. Grahn's book turns the worlds we were shown upside down and inside out, waking us from a deep social coma. Reading it, however, requires a temporary suspension of skepticism and an open mind. It is worth the effort, for while some may disagree with Grahn's findings, they are likely to view life/blood quite differently after the reading.

Both menarche and menopause had significant impact on my personal life as I wrote this, through my own experiences and those of family and friends; none were sufficiently ritualized or celebrated, but we made beginnings. I am delighted that some of my sisters from the Women's Spirituality programs of both California Institute of Integral Studies and New College of California have focused their work on menstruation and are developing rituals to carry back to their communities and families.

Another way we can change the future together is by becoming aware, even when it is painful or foreign to us, of exactly what young women face today--and forming

coalitions with schools and other community organizations to change it. Though many things may have changed for adult women, especially for those consciously making change in their own lives daily, in many respects teenage girls face the same threats to their self-esteem that my generation did. I hear stories now and then that make me feel as though we have even regressed – boys and girls calling each other 'ho' (whore) and 'bitch', for example, at ages 12 and 13, or girls of the same age encountering dating violence.

It seems reasonable to assume that rap music lyrics are another threat to girls' self-esteem and emotional independence. These lyrics raise such gender role and double standard questions as to be thoroughly confusing for any young woman or man. Both the words and the promotional videos are so blatant in their hostility towards and denigration of women as to require a mention here, though I only cite them in passing as a danger to our children's development and as the epitome of dominator model psychology.

In Promiscuities (1997) Naomi Wolf addresses the double standard at length. Her latest book is refreshingly honest, funny and timely in terms of my own work. She takes a look at the double standards with which teenage girls are still surrounded, at the issues facing them as they learn about sexuality and how parents can deal with this question. We learn about the dangers girls face of being called 'shadow sluts' even as they are encouraged to compete for boys' attention and time by offering them 'soft porn'.

I heard Wolf speak just as I began writing this, and was gratified to hear her raise several points I had already explored. These included the non-viability of the 'madonna/whore' or 'nice girl/slut' dichotomy; suppression of desire; exploration of the notion of 'shame'--where it comes from, what feeds it, and ways to get rid of it; and the fact that we do not have a minute to waste in addressing these issues.

Central to achieving these goals is for women to be more comfortable with their sexuality. Sex professional Juliet Anderson [a stage name] writes in Women of the Light: The New Sexual Healers (1994): "I wish I could share my gifts with more women, to help empower them in their sexuality. It helps me to remember that throughout history, visionaries often have been vilified by the majority. My heroes and heroines have been those who rocked the boat" (Anderson, 1994). "One of the most important validations [of my work] came from the late Rev. Carol Knox, minister of a local Unity Church...[who] commended me for doing 'missionary work'—by stressing the importance of not splitting spirituality from sexuality..." (Anderson, 1994).

In myriad ways, then, women--theologians, poets, writers, teachers, artists and artisans, clergy, sex workers, scholars and mothers--are setting great examples through their writings, in the way they live their daily lives, through the new niches they are carving out for themselves professionally, in their scholarship and creativity.

There are many lessons we can learn from these and other female leaders – whether we find them in our families, at our children's schools, in business or at the corner grocer.

And as always, there is much we can learn by trusting the voice within us, if we can stand still long enough to listen.

We must continue to work towards offering all women and men equal access to an affordable education, and to the new technologies which are now a critical component of any learning process. Although equal access to education is not a new idea, we are still far from realizing the goals fought for in the '60s. I also believe it is vital that there be equal representation of all sectors in academia, not just in the selection of teachers but in the selection of intelligent, balanced texts which include the vast body of women's knowledge, analysis and interpretation. Parents should get involved in evaluating the curricula at elementary, middle school and high school levels to insure that perspectives are presented which are racially, culturally and sexually diverse. Syllabi should include readings from not just the 'classics' and established scholars, but from cutting edge writers as well, allowing new voices to enter the discourse from all sectors.

It has been very exciting for me to participate in the current women's spirituality discourse and to contribute to this passionate body of feminist scholarship. Working to create new language and gender role definitions, wrestling with the reshaping of family structures and spiritual practices has been a tremendous challenge. Indeed, being part of a community birthing itself has resulted in a complete re-examination of my way of being.

One key element in that re-examination has been taking a closer look at the creation myths on which I was

raised. The willingness to re-evaluate or deconstruct such myths is vital to all women and men living in contemporary society. As Knapp puts it, "Those who yearn to *see* may glean new insight and alternative directions for themselves by drawing upon and responding to the riches embedded in these myths" (Knapp, 1998). In Lilith's case, I feel that those riches may serve as a warning, as a red alert directing us to read history--whether presented to us as myth or 'fact'--with a keen awareness of who wrote and interpreted it, with our antennae set to search for hidden plagues in the text.

That in turn can lead the intelligent reader, the 'daughter wise enough to ask'[24] to an exploration of modern texts, where there is hope, discovery, much truth and revelations of a type I tend to have more faith in than the Revelations of the King James' bible.

Just as Adam named the animals in Eden, so the modern-day Adam is still allowed to name *our* pleasures, *our* imagined sins, our punishment for those alleged sins, our work, our goals, our motivations – in effect, our life's course. With that naming invariably comes judgment and oppression. I believe it is only by seizing that power of naming that women can be fully whole again, that only through such a metamorphosis can our world once again become an integrated whole.

I enjoy creating my own *midrashim* or interpretations of historical myth at times, and believe it is both fun and a useful means of gaining new perspective which everyone should try now and then. By the same token, envisioning an erotic tree of life which centers on one's own persona, goals

and experiences can be an empowering creative tool for taking personal inventory.

I believe that we must continue to redefine much of our language, a process started by Mary Daly and many other second wave feminists in the '60s and '70s. As we make it more inclusive from the standpoint of both gender and racial/cultural diversity, we must also work to remove the misogynistic words so often used in storytelling. Behavior such as telling jokes which humiliate women, or worse—aberrations such as rape "jokes"—needs to carry with it a heavy social stigma or it will continue; in the course of my research I learned, to my great chagrin, that even women frequently collude in this form of oppression.

I often wonder why the bible's authors wrote a Chapter One for humankind which seems to justify rape and other forms of domestic violence; whether or not this was their original intent, it is how this document has been used.

We could benefit from close textual analysis of the bible and other 'sacred texts'. This work can be undertaken by small groups, both within and outside of formal religious organizations; it could go a long way toward making people more aware of what it is they recite weekly, on what it is based, and whether they still choose to accept all parts of the myths many know only as the "word of God".

I see a hopeful note in such literature as Reimagining The Bible (1998) by folklorist Howard Schwartz, who writes: "In the past, if a woman permitted herself to experience the forbidden passions of Lilith, especially those

of a sexual nature, she was in danger of becoming a kind of Lilith herself in the eyes of the community. Now that the community is not as judgmental, this danger is not as acute"[25].

"...the myths of Lilith and Eve cry out for recognition of their polar nature within a single woman, as do the myths of Jacob and Esau in every man. Every woman is likely to experience the full range of emotions, including those attributed to Eve and those of Lilith...To deny one side or the other is to deny the wholeness of the self" (Schwartz, 1998).

Schwartz includes a wonderful *midrash* by a Holocaust survivor Jakov Lind, who wrote a parable called "The Story of Lilith and Eve" [26]about reuniting these mythic sides of woman into a single being. In this retelling, Lind repairs the original split by creating a situation in which Eve and Lilith are the same woman and "must ultimately be recognized as poles of the same personality rather than as separate individuals...Thus, the reuniting of Lilith and Eve into one in this tale is clearly a call to wholeness, to reintegrate the aspects of the self" (Schwartz, 1998).

"i found God in myself...and i loved her fiercely."
- Ntozake Shange

VII. CREATING A NEW BLUEPRINT
Writing New Rules For Living

When I began my M.A. coursework, I was insulated within the cocoon of a nurturing, stimulating Women's Spirituality program. By the time I started my thesis, when I had more time to spend 'out in the world', it was with a set of new eyes and ears. What I saw and heard in my own community, to my surprise and frustration, was apathy, resistance or lack of understanding for many of the issues we had discussed in class. It became clear then that my chosen course of study was to be a two-edged sword, for while my new worldview had enriched me greatly, it did not allow me to retreat to safe, old paths and patterns. My consciousness had been irrevocably altered and I knew I would never again be able to keep silent, as I often had in the past.

It has been encouraging to witness the many new developments in woman-centered bodies of knowledge—for instance, in art, ritual, literature and educational programs—which have occurred since I began this work, among them:

- The publication of a dictionary of feminist theologies
- Intriguing new writings from sex professionals such as Whores and Other Feminists (1998).
- The reappearance of Lilith in many forms in the 1990s, including a new opera; the anthology Which Lilith?, edited by Enid Dame, Lilly Rivlin and Henny Wenkart; on websites featuring contemporary artwork, retellings of the myth and lively online discussions; in an Anselm Kiefer art exhibit; in music and on film.

- The creation of workshops for young girls and women on topics ranging from menstruation to menopause, which offer ways of looking at these life passages with pride and acceptance.
- The paintings of Max Dashu, creator of the Suppressed Histories Slide Series; Tarah Trueblood's "Redeeming Eve" series; and the work of such artists as Lauren Raine, who sculpts and paints extraordinary expressions of women in various stages of life and goddesses of every culture.
- The symbolic writing, ritual, leadership and passionate artistry of Maura McCarley, Leilani Birely, Liz Fisher, Melanie Gendron and Jackie Olenick. Their spiritual gifts inspire women of different religious traditions with creative energy and visions of a different world.

Also exciting are the many new explorations of organized religion: the inclusion of non-traditional religions such as wicca and other former "fringe" areas in mainstream religious discussions; an increasing amount of cross-cultural, global conversation regarding the religious roles of women and a growing awareness of the causes, horrors and long-term effects of the Inquisition. All these areas are important to understanding women's role in religion and history, and bear ongoing examination and open discussion.

The active dialogue on religion among women within my lifetime was begun 25+ years ago by theologians and scholars including Mary Daly, Carol Christ, Starhawk, Elinor Gadon, Judith Plaskow and Clare Benedicks Fischer; it is one which they continue together with Savina Teubal, filmmaker Donna Read, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Barbette

Stanley Spaeth, Marie-Francoise Guedon, Lucie DuFresne and countless others who are grappling with women's spirituality issues, feminist liberation theology and the re-interpretation of traditional religious theologies, ethics and liturgies.

One of the places in which this dialogue is most alive is in the *Goddess Is Alive!* Series – a program of ritual, performance and presentation of the latest cutting-edge scholarship produced by Serpentina (www.serpentina.com).

Serpentina, a San Francisco Bay Area collective, was started in 1997 by Dianne Jenett and Judy Grahn, two of the first women in the country to receive Ph.D. degrees in Women's Spirituality from California Institute of Integral Studies as this book went to press. Judy is now co-director and Dianne is on the faculty of the Women's Spirituality MA program at New College of California in San Francisco.

Writing new rules for living

One of the primary goals of the women I work and study with is to effect positive change in the world. How do we make change? What forms of social action are most effective? How can women become more aware that they have choice? Whose job is it to teach the full meaning of personal responsibility to both girls and boys? How can men and women help each other construct partnership models instead of fear-based hierarchies? These remain open questions for thoughtful reflection and *action.*

I believe it is also critical that we be aware of how much power we give our religious and spiritual leaders.

While responsible clergy may bring us comfort and guidance, indeed *because* we seek their counsel and emotional support in times of crisis, we must be wary of relinquishing our own discernment when we enter a house of worship. For once we do that, do we not empower clergy at the risk of disempowering ourselves? It is a personal, spiritual risk—one which we should only take after careful thought—to put someone else in a position to tell us how we should image God, what God thinks of us, and to a great extent, how we should *think*.

Do we require an intermediary to God at all? Can we not pray *directly* to God; are we not, in the end, the only ones who *can* determine what our relationship is with our deity? It would seem that God has a place in that discussion more than a third party who thinks they know—or is given the awesome responsibility by others *to* know—what everyone's individual image of and relationship to God should be.

By the same token, would it not be more meaningful, more inspirational, more *exciting* to create our own liturgy?

Clearly, the need is great for both responsible spiritual leadership and for a clear definition of our own sense of personal responsibility for our lives and decisions.

I believe that as women, we too frequently overlook the fact that we can be each other's strongest sources of spiritual teaching and nourishment, love and support. It is vital that women talk, share stories and look for ways to stay connected with one another. It is a connection I denied

myself for years, at a cost of much emotional and spiritual isolation. It is because I do not want others to repeat my mistakes that I feel driven to use my voice--for my own sake and my son's, and on behalf of those women who cannot or are forbidden to speak.

I knew my work had touched a chord when I received a touching letter from a longtime friend in New York who

read this manuscript in its early stages. She thanked me for writing it, and said I had validated the life choices she had made concerning sexuality, and that she no longer felt like a social misfit for choosing a life of sexual freedom over marriage.

I will consider us well on our way towards shaping a new culture when women no longer feel they have to be embarrassed about or make excuses for not getting married, when they can openly enjoy being sexually free without repercussions and when the 'double standard' is a thing of the past.

It is gratifying that many women, both "good girls" and "bad girls" are finding their voice, as exemplified by the birth of The Lilith Fair in 1997, the first concert tour comprising only female musicians. Conceived and profitably produced by a woman, singer Sarah McLachlan, The Lilith Fair was a great success despite media and industry skepticism. It is exciting to observe women taking the reins in producing their own work; in so doing, they are among the many women redefining leadership for themselves, those around them and those who will follow.

As more and more women take on leadership roles, I hope women will become less reluctant to embrace both the notion and the exercise of power. If we share a common vision and can work together in new ways—not always competing but in collaboration—then perhaps we can also find ways of building partnership models for all of society, in business, in relationship. Ultimately, this will be the blueprint for creating a world which is more egalitarian, spiritually erotic, emotionally fulfilling—a world in which we are *all* full participants. It is only in this way that we can wield Lilith's power—and our own—as a constructive tool for creative change, to transform a domination-based present into a future of unlimited possibilities.

NOTES

NOTES

1. Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia; Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom (Matthews, 1991).

2. See Demetra George, Mysteries of the Dark Moon 1992).

3. Unfortunately I came to terms with this--recognizing Lilith as a positive and negative dark force--and stopped trying to whitewash her, 'clear her reputation' too late in my writing process to develop this more fully.

4. Here Noble cites Lawrence Durdin-Robertson's The Goddesses of Chaldea, Syria, and Egypt, 1978.

5. See Betty Meador's discussion on pp. 116-120 in Uncursing The Dark (1994).

6. Shuttle & Redgrove interpret the word 'lap' to mean a woman's vulva (see pp. 20-21, The Wise Wound (1978) for further discussion of the term.

7. Dr. Eli Yassif confirmed this during a personal conversation in Tel Aviv in October, 1999.

8. I have decided to go with the spelling provided by Raphael Patai, in part because he was one of my earliest and most constant sources. I also must credit him with having the courage to come out with a book entitled The Hebrew Goddess in 1967. Though at first I faulted him for not questioning or looking more closely at the

characterization of Lilith as a demon, I now feel that coming from a religious Jewish home and traditional academia as he did, this may have been something of a risk.

9. My thanks to Dr. Martin Schwartz of University of California at Berkeley for his thoughts on this point, and for giving me a new perspective on the three angels.

10. Judy Grahn discusses men's parallel menstrual rites, rituals which imitate female menstruation in the context of her metaformic theory, outlined in her thought-provoking book Blood, Bread and Roses (1993). See also Bruno Bettelheim (Symbolic Wounds,1955).

11. Mythology of All Races notes a belief in *al*'s or demons

12. In stark contrast to J.A. Scurlock's interpretation of the *lilu* as the actual baby killers (Incognita, 1991).

13. It seems even this modern day source can only attribute the danger to women and children as coming from another woman!

14. The Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text, translated by George M. Lamsa from the Aramaic of the Peshitta (1933) offers the 'screech owl' translation.

15. If this 'day of vengeance' refers to the Apocalypse, it is also possible that the owl is mentioned as a representative of death. Vicki Noble writes in Shakti Woman (1991), "Owls everywhere represent death...and they have always been connected to magic and healing power. Shamans everywhere are connected to owls but

the animal has become a symbol of evil in most cultures since the patriarchal transition..." (Noble, 1991).

It is also interesting to note the parallels with the 9th Century tale "The Alphabet of Ben Sira", which says Lilith left Adam to go live in a cave by the Red Sea; the sea is viewed by some scholars as a type of wilderness.

16. Perhaps the original writers imagined that Inanna viewed Lilith as another goddess trying to usurp her power.

17. Patai also calls this reference to Lilith a 'doubtful one' (Patai, 1967).

18. By most accounts Lilith preceded Adam's better known wife Eve by 130 years.

19. As I received hundreds of these electronic mailings over the past few years, I imagined them being sent by underpaid women sitting at computer terminals around the world. However my partner, who works in the technology industry, quickly reminded me that, unlike the 'phone sex' business, this business does not require live bodies. A company simply requires a programmer to set up a system which will automatically send out a letter or series of letters, under different names, with slightly differing texts. He also noted that while a sender's address may end with 'uk', for example, indicating it was sent from the United Kingdom, in reality it can originate anywhere in the world and be programmed to bounce to a server in another country to appear as if it were sent from there.

20. Eisler's term is actually the 'dominator' model but I feel that without equalizing the balance even in our description of this phenomenon, we again give the dominator more attention and may in that instant overlook the one who is suppressed or oppressed.

21. See At The Crossroads (1993) by Carol Gilligan, a groundbreaking study of how young girls' confidence suddenly hits a wall and erodes around the ages of 11 to 13.

22. As examples, I refer here to the "blue laws" still on the books in a number of states which forbid oral sex between consenting adults; to the attention paid to stifling children who speak with great passion or use physical gestures when they talk; to the tone and facial expression of adults telling children to stop masturbating.

23. See http://www.lilitu.com

24. A reference to a line from the *Haggadah*, the book of prayer and song used at the seder dinner during the Jewish holiday of Passover.

25. While Schwartz may be correct in implying that an openly sexual woman living in the United States would not be stoned to death, I still think she puts herself in danger. The danger simply has a different face: she may acquire enemies or unwanted sexual attention, lose status and opportunity in many workplaces, and would still be ostracized in most communities. Schwartz does acknowledge that "other dangers lurk, especially those of an unconscious nature" but it is not clear if he is referring to a woman's individual psyche or that of the community.

26. "The Story of Lilith and Eve" from The Stove and Other Stories by Jakov Lind (New York: 1986), pp. 59-61.

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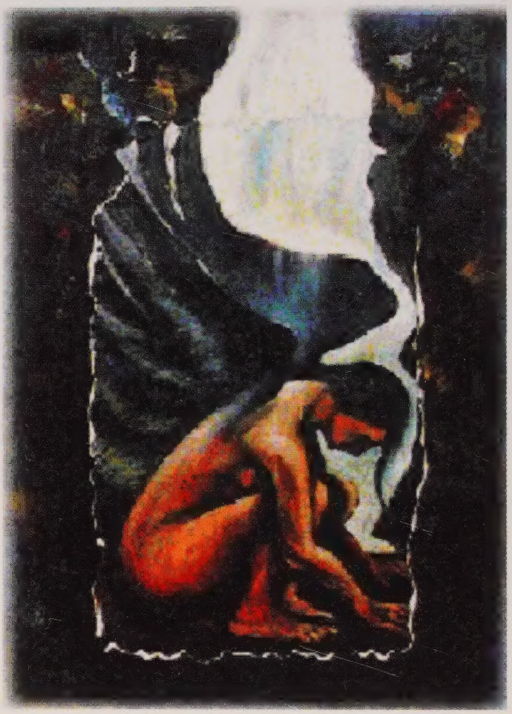

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